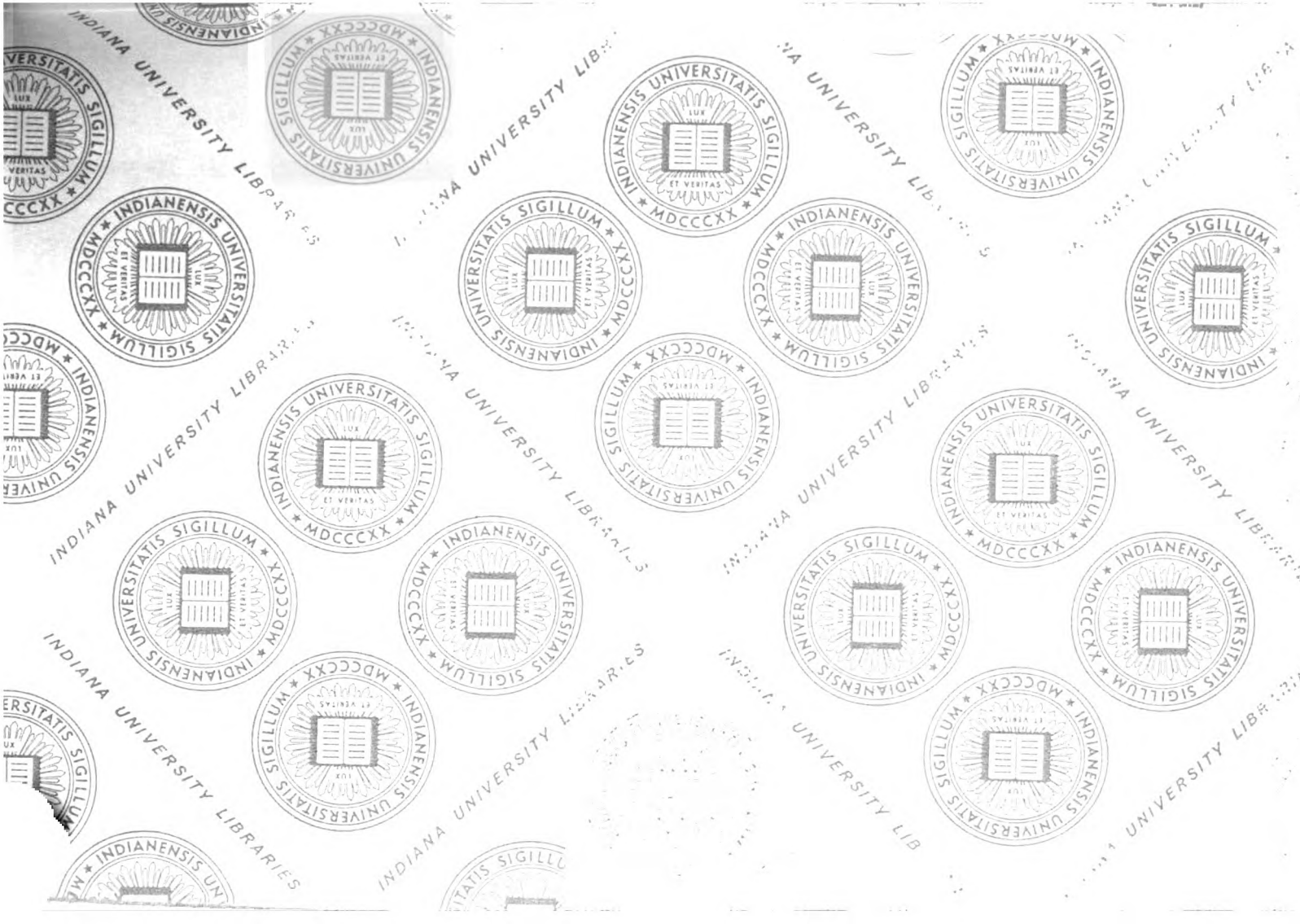
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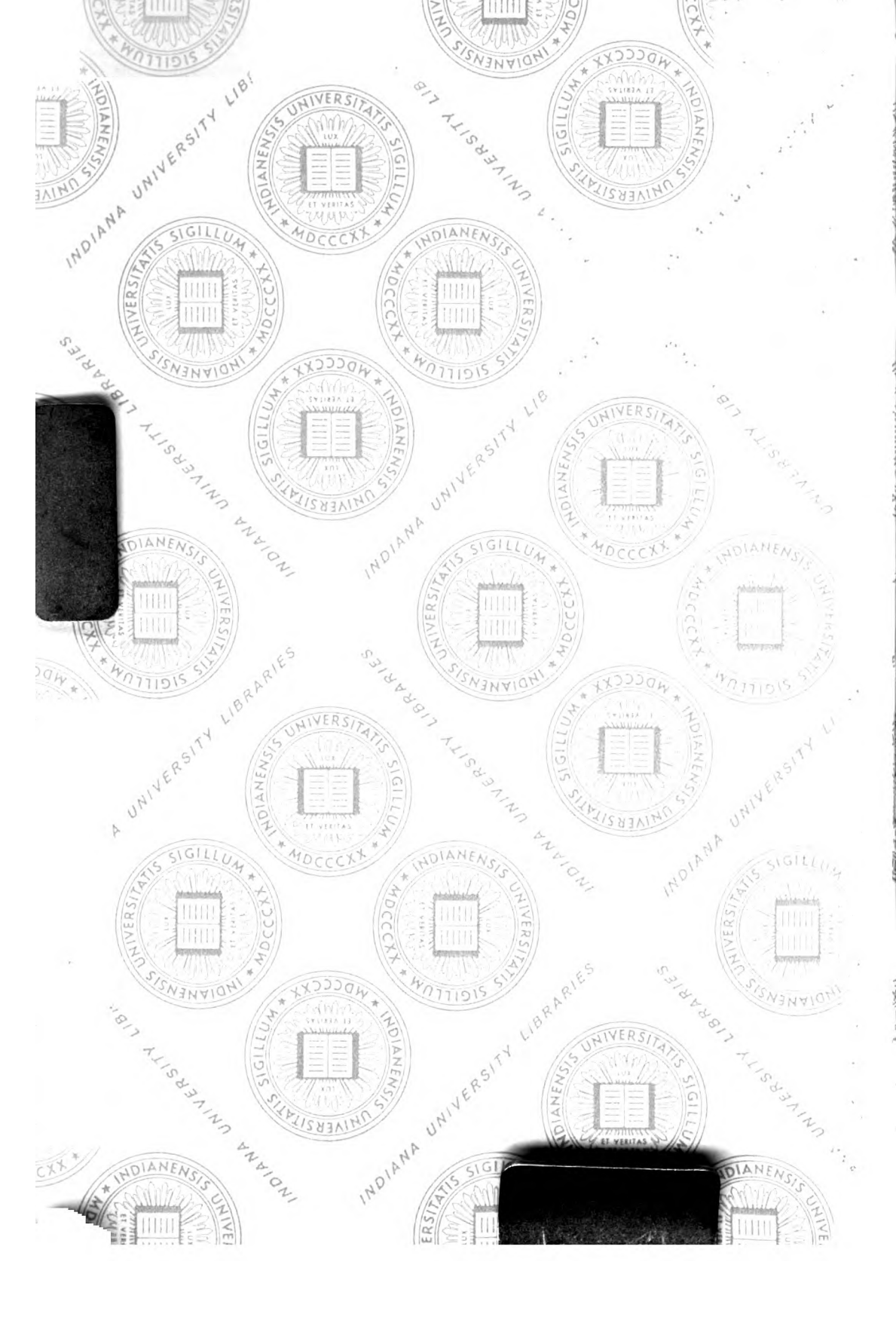
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The ARGOSY
The WORLD'S BEST STORIES

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# Action

*Of a man who lived to the utmost*

By C. E. MONTAGUE

WHEN Christopher Bell was just fifty-two he woke up one September morning to feel a slight numbness all down his right side. Some of the numbness was in his right arm; a good deal of it in his right thigh, along its outside; rather less in his right foot; and just a little in his head—all over the hinterland of his right ear.

It seemed a big percentage of a man to "go to sleep" at one time. He lay still for a minute, to let it pass off. But it didn't. So he began to speculate. When he got up would he be able to stand? And to walk straight? Would his head go on working all right, with that bit of it stiff? Just how hard a punch would it turn out to be, that some god or devil had given him in the night?

He tried. Yes, he could stand, walk, dress and shave. No portion of him was absolutely on strike. But the numbness went on. And somehow he couldn't feel sure that some part of the right flank of his body or brain would not give way, without notice, and give him a cropper. You never know how deliciously sure you have been of yourself, of every scrap of yourself, all the days of your health, till some small gadget inside you is put out of action. Bell made this deep reflection while going downstairs to his solitary breakfast. He kept one hand on the bannisters.

Christopher Bell was the reigning sovereign of a respectable dynasty of "merchant princes" in Manchester. For several generations his clan had embraced the higher civilisation so far as English public schools and universities lead to such embraces. He had read with understanding and relish, and he had travelled with open eyes. He could value the great things in the arts and in science—indeed, in the whole ampler life of the race. And always, till now, his blood had pretty well bubbled with health. He had rowed, run, swum and ridden well. To his body, at forty years old, the War had brought a second boyhood of happy absorption in efforts merely physical.

Half way through the War, the wife he had loved in every tissue of body and soul had died of something brought on by too passionate overwork for the cause. The news came to Bell in a hospital where he had just begun to grow a new skin on a face and hands well flayed and charred by chemical warfare. He could not see at the time, so a nurse read the telegram out. His face was buried deep in a canary-coloured mask of wadding stained with picric acid; so the nurse could not tell how he took it—only knew that he thanked her very civilly through the little blow-hole left for his mouth. I fancy Bell was hanging on hard to the thought that he still had two children, a boy and a girl, both in their teens. Soldiers, even educated ones, are apt to grow sentimental, especially when wounded. Bell, the war widower, lay, week by week, behind his fancy-dress mask, staying his

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mind on an ingenuous vision of an improved world to come after the war. He saw it as a young man and a young woman standing in summer twilight, under the stars, with their eyes all a-shine at the loveliness of the life which it had taken so much pain and shame to make possible for them.

Many soldiers hugged these quaint fancies, in their bad times. They helped, for the moment. It was afterwards that they had to be paid for. In the foul enervatory air that filled England and Europe just after the war, Bell's boy and girl drifted feebly into failure. Both were married lovelessly now, each to another small waste product of that waste-producing time. Somewhere out of Bell's sight these forfeited objects of his pride and joy were shuffling punily through life. He gathered that they were rather ashamed of him as an old slow-coach provincial.

Bell was not given to wallowing in self-pity. Still, as you see, he had had his losses, like another.

Your British merchant prince, in these days, is prone to lose heart, get himself up as an owner of land and beeves, and melt weakly into the common herd of squires who know not, poor fellows, what it is to go on 'Change. Bell was different. He had pride. He stuck, as his father had done, to his post among the garrison of the smutty city that had done well by them. He lived where he could hear the Town Hall clock strike twelve when the traffic was quiet at night, and a North wind blowing. He liked the sound, he was so oddly civic a person.

To this old-fashioned hobby Bell added some cheap habits less rare in rich men. He stood on guard against his wealth, lest it should cut him off from the sight and sound of ordinary and unprincely men, for whom his regard had been redoubled by four years of living with them in the War. Because of this fad he nearly always went into the city by tram. This morning he walked the three hundred yards from his house to the tram's stopping-place with deliberate caution. He could not be sure of that sleepy right leg. He was still distrusting it temperately when he had taken his seat and was tendering his fare to town.

The conductor rejected the tender, at sight. "We doan't taake boottons," he said with civil composure.

Bell examined the bright disc that he had offered as a sixpence. Behold! a silvery trouser-button. Last night it had come off and he had slipped it into a pocket. He put his finger-tips ruefully up to his eyes. "I'm sorry," he said to the man as he gave the right coin.

"It's all reet, sir," the conductor said quietly. Once he saw that no pulling of legs had been intended, his tact and sympathy were perfect.

He passed on to collect other fares. But a new care remained in Bell's mind. Sight, too? Was that going? Sight, touch, the whole sensory apparatus losing precision, entering on the long slope to decay—the silver cord going loose and the golden bowl crackling? When a man who has known how to read feels the first clap of the hand of Time on his shoulder, he has plenty of ready prompters to ruefulness; so many excellent poets have found handsome words for the mists and mellow poignancy of man's autumn, the lapse from the old vigour and vision into mere drug-taker's dreams while we are led down the avenue lined with overblown roses, to lie in the dust at its end.

Bell kept his head. But his memory was beginning to bulge with lovely quotations not conducive to high spirits—"Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang," and all that lot.

¶

THE morning's office work did him good, while it lasted. He had more than most men of the gift of forgetting himself in the excitement of getting a job to come right—any old job, the dictating of letters, anything. And just now the affairs of his firm were of quite stirring interest. Like many others it had been making large losses for several years. Bell's game was to keep these losses as low as he could without stopping the work and wages of a moorland villageful of people who spun and wove cotton for Bell to sell for less than it cost to make it.

This unacquisitive practice brought Bell into great infamy. Most of his fellow-employers wanted to close all the factories down, or half-close them down, and leave the work-people to live on their fat. So Bell was an arrant traitor to them. Still, he was an employer: and so, to ardent Socialist eyes, he was a sucker of blood, *ex officio*. This lively cross-fire of censures braced Bell. If it had to be woe unto you when all men spoke well of you, it might be safer when everyone slated you hard. Anyhow,



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it livened you up, like a good stinging wind that has blown across snow. While he schemed to find some not quite ruinous sale for the stuff that piled itself up at the mills, Bell could forget the thing that had clawed him in its clutch during the night.

But the clouds return after the rain: luncheon time set his mind free to worry, the way your sore tongue returns and returns to the amusement of hurting itself on the sharp point of a tooth lately broken. He lunched at the club; and, twice in the one hour it took him, his mind accused younger members of paying him the pestilential kind of un-arguing deference which is really the civil refusal of youth to keep its communications open with age. Could they have noticed the way he walked down the stairs—a canny way, like a horse's when it is afraid on a slippery slope? One younger man opened the door of the billiard-room for him. Damn these good manners that ain't good at all!

Going home at twilight in the tram, Bell thought over all this so absorbedly that he kept his legs crossed the whole way. So, when he stood up, to get off, his right leg had gone clean asleep. It was only asleep in the common and blameless way. Still, he couldn't know that at first. For all he could tell a second stroke might have fallen, and this time a real knock-out. Of course he kept his fears dark; still, he stepped off the car with such unconcealable care that the conductor slipped a friendly hand under his arm and led him slowly to the safety of the footpath, like a blind man or a drunk.

When Bell had walked a few yards by himself the extra numbness was gone. But the other numbness remained. And so did the feel of that patiently guarding hand under his arm. Of course, he had not needed it. Still, perhaps he would presently. "*Mene, mene,*" &c.—every wall seemed to be covered with sinister shreds of writing. An object for everybody's protection, a call on everyone's forbearance—that was the kind of pest that he might become. Soon, too, perhaps. This kind of plague crept on and on. It never turned back. Five years might bring an invalid chair and a male nurse to put him to bed and to see that he was carted securely about from place to place, to sprawl in the sun—Mentone, the Canaries, Egypt, all the places to which the decayed butterflies of our commonwealth were brought to lie out and doze in the warmth when too much eating and idling had brought them back all the way to the status of larvæ. Disgusting!

¶

BELL gazed steadily into this smiling future while eating his dinner alone. From the table he went straight, like a man who knew what he needed, to that shelf in his study on which there were all his pet Alpine books. No other sport had ever so wholly ravished his soul as mountaineering. On the high snows it seemed as if magical fires were lit in your blood; the flame of life burned amazingly there; something was added unto a man as divine as whatever it is that makes its way into the vapid juice of a fruit and turns it to wine. Nowhere else in the world was the taste of success so wholly and indefeasibly sweet as it was on the tip of some spire of granite and ice that had all but turned you back in despair by the Daphnean rigour of its resistance. There, uplifted on the swell of the round earth, you could see how men had come to dream Gardens of Eden and Ages of Gold.

He took from the shelf a great climber's narratives of his greatest adventures. Two of these, in especial, could always entrance Bell as soon as he had read a few lines: their vividness gave him an almost physical sense of what they described. Each was a case of cutting steps up a long and extremely steep slope of ice. And in each case the slope had, at one point, ceased even to slope. For just a few feet of its height it had become as vertical as the wall of a house: each man of the party had had to hold himself into the perpendicular wall by sheer strength and good hand-hold against gravitation.

In each case the party had come safely through. But with how big a margin of safety, as engineers say? Bell wondered. A pretty big one, he fancied. Few good climbers slipped in really difficult places; all their faculties were bent up too intently for that, with danger about; they were above their own every-day form. But what if such a party were to try paring and paring away at that pretty wide margin? Something like an experiment, that! To what untold heights of achievement might not the party attain before all the margin was gone! And, of course, the party might be a party of one.

Bell had once had a holiday dream of climbing a crag that grew steeper and

steeper till it was vertical first, and then overhung, more and more, but still he climbed on and on because the crag beetled out over a warm summer sea, so that, when he lost hold in the end, he would only fall from one pleasure into another, out of a mountaineer's paradise into a swimmer's. Cut out the old fear of death in that way, or some other, and—why, you could do anything.

As he sat back with the open book on his knees, a light wind stirred the trees in the garden. It may have been this that called up another old notion of his. This one had visited him in a wood close to Arras, in 1916. During some dark windless weeks of that autumn the unfallen leaves had been fading inertly from green to a dull rusty red, and so down to a dead russet brown; the whole burning heart of the year was collapsing into shabby ashes. Then a night of frost came and then a gale on a day of broken sunshine thrown wildly about between clouds. As the gale stripped the trees it had seemed almost to blow them aflame; sparks of brave yellow flew in the air; the dun beech-leaves took light and fell lustrously. Somehow the sight had filled Bell, at the time, with a wish that, when he had to go, he might do it like that—all a-stir and a-glow, by one of the "violent" deaths, as most of the easy ones seemed to be called. Anything but to lie on a bed in a hushed room, with the lights low and life's jolly noises shut out, and people whispering among the shadows. One wrench for the undecayed body, and then unbreakable sleep—what end could equal it?

Now, almost suddenly, these several notions ran into one, as rain-drops do on a newly wet window. Here was the moment to put into practice that old and sound choice of his between the long decrepitude of the flesh and the one clean cut and summary pang that saves you it all. Suicide? Oh, no. But just to carry on, right to the end, the piquant experiment of paring and paring away that limiting and restraining margin of safety which mountaineers, even the boldest, keep in reserve. Had not all things conspired to free him from too much love of remaining alive—bereavement and baulked hope and now this first lick of fire from heaven, soon to blast the whole of him by degrees? Why, fate had brought him the fulfilment of his old dream. No precipice in the world would now have an abhorred death waiting at its foot—merely a warm quiet sea of painless forgetfulness.

Only—he must be quick, before the accursed thing that was setting to work on him could pith so much of the vigour out of his body that he could not make his own way to a place—already he had a good place in his mind—where he might try the thing out.

¶

AT the end of September a savoursome blend of jollity and melancholy pervades the little Val d'Anniviers. The summer hotels of Zinal, at the head of the valley, are closing. Down the bridle path, through forests of fir, the hotel staffs stream along joyously, laden with the year's vintage of tips, to their snug winter homes in the Rhone Valley below. Reconverted, after four months of restraint and disguise, into young, natural Swiss men and women, they caper like Alpine cows let out in the spring. Shouting, chaffing and singing, they seem to flout with their merriment Nature's yearly menace to marmots and men. And Nature answers them back. Almost hour by hour the new snow creeps down the forested slopes of the valley and grizzles more of its firs; the morning dew lies late, and even at noon the weakening sun hangs lazily low above the main chain of the Alps. You feel, all about you, a big closing-in, the rustle of a heavy curtain falling upon a good time that is played out at last.

As Bell walked the six miles up from Vissoye to Zinal, he breasted that jovial current of waiters and chamber-maids thawed and re-humanised. Jove! they were good to see and to hear, with their jokes and catches and bold, friendly, unobsequious looks at every man and brother they met. But everything was good in this place. Even the smell of Vissoye and its pigs, as he passed, had been the smell of the best holiday of his boyhood. How he had liked life—every bit of it, coloured or plain, the high lights and the low! Even the jars had been part of the makings of the incomparable adventure. He wondered whether the mere feel of things—common things, all sorts of things—could ever have given anyone else such raptures of secret contentment as they had given to him.

He had made sure of a room at Zinal. He dined by the light of one lamp in a corner of the hotel's dining-room, now empty and shadowy. An elderly woman

waited upon him; everyone else in the house had gone down the valley; she had been left for a week or two more, to cook, wait, make a bed and draw out a bill for anyone mad enough to turn up so belatedly. Bell had known her for thirty years—ever since her marriage to an old guide of his, recently killed on the Meije. She told him how their son Pierre was now a guide too, rather to her alarm. She seemed amazingly glad to see Bell, as if he were a bit of some good old world that had been slipping away. And he——? she asked. Was he making a *grande course*, as always? Surely not, at this time of year?

He fenced with her apt, friendly questions. He felt like a liar. Indeed, he was one, pretty well, for he fully meant to deceive. He would go for a walk by himself, he said, after breakfast to-morrow—perhaps to the Arpitetta Alp only, perhaps rather further.

She looked at him sadly, with peasant directness. "All alone now!" she said simply. "And once it was you and Madame—and Gaspard and me. Ah! the good times." She had all humanity's fate in her face, like an old woman drawn by Rembrandt—hopes and happy love and then the dust of the day, dimming the roses, and then great loneliness and unconsolable tears. Would Monsieur have coffee, she asked.

Bell could face her no longer. It was too treacherous. No, he said, he would want nothing more. Let her go to bed early, like all the good marmots. So would he too, when he had smoked a little end of tobacco.

When she was gone, he sat by a fire of logs she had lit for him in the small smoking-room. To his surprise he found he had nothing to do. There could be no saying good-bye, no specious last letter to write, no will to be made, no manifesto of any sort to be left. People do not do such things just before unforeseen accidents—for the wood must look raw at the break. A real good tip for the widow of Gaspard would have to be left in an obvious place: that was all.

It went beyond having nothing to do. There was nothing to think. He had no fears of *post mortem* torture to busy his brain, for the God of his faith was no fiend. He was equally void of covetous hopes of a sensational "good time" when the breath should be out of his body. So far he might have expected his mind to be free. The strange thing was to find how much of one's usual matter for thought is taken away if, in twenty hours or so, one will have nothing whatever to fix up or to see to, no house or business to run, no special beat to patrol, no arts or letters to care for, nor "public duties" to mind. It was a release. But it was a queer one—a kind of vacuous and disquieting freedom, such as a man might attain who has suddenly let off the pressure of gravitation, so that he needn't keep his feet down to the earth any more—in fact, couldn't press on it hard if he tried, and so couldn't get any purchase for putting forth his strength upon anything at all. Bell's released mind did its best to think firmly of what he was going to do the next day. But no firmness came; the levers of thought could not find any fulcrum; they worked at a loss, feebly and fumblingly.

He brought over the lamp to review the inn's tiny library—two shelves freakishly peopled with the printed leavings of guests lettered, half-lettered, unlettered, conventional, independent and odd. There was the common aphrodisiac novel of commerce; there was "The Vicar of Wakefield," all golden sunshine and wit; there were Nat Gould and the wise, humane book of the great William James on the incessant endeavours of men to find or to imagine some larger life on which to rest the frail and soon-tired figure of their own. Yes, that was it: something to lean against: something sure not to give when you put your whole weight on it, in any state of yourself: that was where peace and strength were to be had; nowhere else. So he fancied, at least: he could not be sure; he was still in that vacuum where his thoughts had no pivot to work on: the wheels did not bite on the road: the cogs would not engage: he thought and he felt, but gropingly, not with the sure and eager drive of a mind and heart that have found themselves by forgetting themselves.

¶

THE place that Bell had picked for his purpose was on the West side of the Schallijoch. The Schallijoch, as you may know, is a dip in the ridge that joins the Weisshorn to the Schalihorn. Even the lowest point of the dip is more than twelve thousand feet high. The last part of the rise to the ridge from the West is up one of the steepest slopes of ice that are climbed.

That is if you mount it where it is least steep. At some other points it is steeper than any slope that is climbed, or thought to be climbable. The surface of this wall of ice undulates like a sheet of hammered copper—here a concave patch and there a convex one. Though the wall at its steepest, leans back from the straight, as a whole, it has parts—the upper halves of these hollows, and lower halves of these bulges—at which it is vertical for some feet at a time; and at two or three parts it even overhangs slightly. These last, avoided by climbers happily wedded to life, were what Bell had in mind. He would start up the wall at the steepest part he could find; as he went on he would make, at each stage, for the point where there seemed to be most of an overhang. He would do the thing honestly—try all that was in him to bring the climb off, reach the ridge and prove that, in this small matter, man could do more than he knew. With careful timing he would be up, if up at all, about dusk. In that unlikely event he would carry the test a step further and try to come down his ice ladder by feel, in the dark, instead of descending the gentle snow slopes on the Eastern side of the pass.

He worked out a time-table. Three hours' walk up to the Arpitetta Alp from Zinal. Three more up from the Alp to the foot of the final ice-wall. Half an hour for eating; another half hour for sundries, and four for the ultimate work on the wall. Eleven hours in all. To-morrow's evening dusk would be over by seven. He would push off at eight in the morning.

Probably you would have thought him rather a pleasant sight as he quitted Zinal—the outward figure of a hale, fit mountaineer; just a little stricken with years, but vigorous; brindled, but not at all bald; leanly and brownly good-looking; turning out by himself, with his axe under his arm and a little luncheon in his pocket, for a walk among the feet of old sporting friends like the Weisshorn and Roth-horn. How can you tell by the looks of a man that he would not feel the point of a pin if you ran it into his thigh, or that this exemption from pain is causing any disturbance of his spirits?

Nobody was to be seen at the emerald Alp of Arpitetta. Like the almost deserted Zinal, like yesterday's valley path streaming with walkers carrying bundles, the empty hovels on the Alp recalled the sight of a whole countryside in flight before the army of an invader. The ashes left from the cheesemaker's fire were wet with drippings from the roof; the rough wooden crane used for swinging the cauldron over the flames flapped in a draught from the door. Outside, the intoxicant beauty of gentian and orchis was over for the year; the rich grass had spread back over the trodden mud of the milking-place; but snow was lying a few hundred feet higher up. The invader was near.

Bell's legs were liking the work. The numb one was numb, but it did not give out; it would not let him down. By one o'clock he had reached the tail end—some would call it the snout—of the big Weisshorn Glacier, eaten his rations and set a first foot on the rough convex of honeycombed ice, with water flushing out its millions of cells; for the sun was on it. He pawed the stuff tenderly with his axe. Perdition catch his soul but he did love it—strong as iron, carvable as cheese: what genuis could have conceived so delicious a union of opposites if, by some disaster, no glaciers had been made?

By three o'clock he was through the freak shapes of the ice-fall, across the snowfield above it, and close to the wall that he sought. Yes, its great width and height had the wavy surface that he remembered. It showed like a vast relief map of some low rolling downland, modelled in ice and then set up to stand on its edge. Off to his right, as he looked up, the general angle was easiest. That was the regular way—very steep but quite practicable. That was of no use for his purpose. Far away to his left the slope looked ferocious enough. But down it an almost continuous fall of stones of all sizes, broke away from the sun-warmed rocks of the Weisshorn, came sliding and hissing, or bounding and smashing explosively. That was no use either. That way would be suicide, not experiment.

He soon saw what he wanted—almost directly above him. There, nearly all the way up to the ridge, the ice was steep and bare and blue, and the face of it waved more at this place than anywhere else. Several broad bosses of rocks must have underlain the smooth surface. Over these the close-fitting ice swelled like a stocking upon a bent knee. Up to the centre of each of these bosses the ice bulged out overhangingly: just above each centre it would recede at a more merciful angle;

but nowhere in the whole thousand feet of ascent would a man have a foothold to stand on, unless he made it.

Bell conscientiously tightened each boot-lace and puttee-strings. Then he set off for the point where he had descried the best overhang. It was half-way, as he judged, to the top of the wall. If he should conquer that one, then he would look for another, more bulgy.

He cut his steps with almost fanatical care. He had a disagreeable sense of doing something furtive: he couldn't help asking himself, against his own will, "What if somebody saw?" Damn somebody, another part of him said. Still, he cut every step as if he defied the whole solar system to say that it was not the work of a good craftsman bent upon keeping alive. So he rose slowly. It took a good two hours' work to mount a third of the way to the ridge. But then he was close to what mattered more—the great bulge that he was making for.

The bulge stood out like a gigantic blister upon the face of the ice. It must have been forty feet in diameter and it jutted so much that a stone dropped from its outermost point would only have touched the slope again some fifty feet lower. So the climax had come. To reach that outermost point he would have to climb up for twenty feet as you climb up the underside of a ladder that leans against a wall. And he would have to make the ladder, rung by rung, as he climbed it—fashion each rung out of the ice with his axe, held in one hand, while with the other hand and both feet he clung to three of the rungs made already, and held up the body against the drag of its weight. Every rung would have to be made like a letter-box in a door, big enough for the toe of a boot to go in, but so shaped that, when a hand entered, the fingers could bend down inside and grip as you grip the top of a fence. The grand, the crucial question was how long one hand and one arm could hold the body in to the projecting ice-wall. For what part of the two hours or so that the other labouring hand might require to cut that fantastical staircase? Of course, if his axe should slip out of his hand, or if one step should break, that would end the affair. But away with the thought of any such bungling.

The moment the overhang started, Bell discovered the theory of gravitation to be exceedingly true. The work was amazingly hard. When he had carved five letter-boxes, and used them, an hour had gone. He carved five more and observed that daylight was failing. Behind his back an unsensational sunset was going on at its ease. His left hand was chilled almost dead with all the ice it had gripped; his right wrist was swollen and sore with the intensity of the axe-work; his right knee had begun to shake as uncontrollably as chattering teeth; he heard his breath as if it were somebody else's: it made a dry rustling noise, like a bird struggling silently in the hand.

The centre of the boss was now, he reckoned, some eight feet above his head. Beyond it he could see nothing, as yet, but a tranquil sky with a rose-coloured flush dying out of it. Five letter-boxes more, he thought, might take him up to the nipple of this frozen breast and bring the receding slope of its upper half into his sight.

It was just at this very point that it struck him as clear, sober matter of fact that he could not get up those eight feet. His strength was running out fast: one more good letter-box was all that he could conceive himself able to make. He made it, hacking away with slow, painful strokes, his axe-handle slippery with his sweat. He reached up his left hand to grab the new hold and dragged a foot up to its new place below. Then, just to go down fighting, he went through the movement of starting to chip out yet another step. Second by second the effort held out; his strokes were the taps of a child; his wrist felt like breaking; yet somehow he finished the hole and forced his left hand to rise up to it: then he even hauled up in its turn a right foot of infinite weight: the poor quivering knee had to straighten out next, and did it, after a long, doubtful struggle. But that was the end, he felt, of all possible effort.

By this time all his senses had the morbid exaltation that will sometimes come of fierce physical effort. His mind was at leisure, after a fashion. He was fully aware of the sunset; he did not miss the charm of its sabbatical calm: the majesty and mystery of mountains were still there, all right. A verse he had liked as a boy came into his head, as beautiful things that have built themselves into your mind are apt to do at a crisis—as people who once

went to church will cry out " Oh, God ! " when a smash comes.

*And here indeed might death be fair*
*If death be dying into air,*
*And souls evanished mix with the*
*Illumined sky, eternal sea.*

But no pretty dying for him, if death could be still headed off. He started desperately to try again, sweating and straining. No good: the feeble strokes of his axe scarcely scratched the bare ice; his left hand was frost-bitten now, past feeling anything. Only five feet to relative safety, but five more than any spur worn by his will could drive the spent body. " I'm done," he said, and ceased to struggle upwards.

¶

SOME innate impulse to take the thing well, and not to let human dignity down at a pinch, kept him resolved to hold on, foot and hand, to the last moment possible.

While he clung so, the sun left him. A high Alpine sunset is sudden, like tropical ones. A cold, sharp-edged shadow raced up from the valley, chasing the sunlight before it. Pursuer and fugitive scudded up over the tops of the firs and across the bright green of the Alp that Bell had passed, and then up the ice-fall and on up the wall till the shadow came down like a great frigid hand on the sweaty back of his neck. Next moment the last warmth and light fleeted up out of sight, over the bulge. As his gaze followed, his cheeks felt the sting of a few falling granules of ice; little chips of it, rather; even a few rather big ones. A trickle of icy scraps seemed to be sliding down the upper half of the bulge, to dive into space on reaching its centre—most of them clear of his back.

Queer ! Was an ice avalanche coming ? No need to suppose it, though. Glaciers, crushed and huddled things, always heaving and cracking, played curious tricks and ground out all sort of freak rubbish. Oh ! let the ice do what it liked; all his business with it was done; all that he could now attend to was a kind of dream noise, big, muted and almost asleep, that the torrent was making, enormously far off, down in the blackening trench of the valley—that and a kind of emotional dream of himself, the dying man doing his best to leave as was meet—a figure at which he could look, as it were, from outside, and dreamily feel it to be rather touching.

Into this semi-dream there managed to enter, also, a sound more abrupt—a little noise like the low startled cry that some women give when they see a horse fall or a big window is smashed. The cry worked itself into his dream, but also it roused him. " Getting light-headed," he thought. But he wasn't. Almost as quick as that thought, a new sound, a light hissing rub, rushed down to his ears and an ice-axe slid over the bulge overhead and out into the air; it whizzed past the back of his head.

To anyone versed in high mountains an ice-axe loose and falling in any such place is a portent of horror, like a child's pony galloping riderless home, or a boat adrift, bottom uppermost in a Thames lasher. It means that somebody may have just lost the power to move, without help, at a place where a man unable to move will soon be unable to live. Suddenly Bell's mind took eyes to itself; it saw a party of some sort above him, trying to cut its way down the ice wall, straight towards the deadly bulge that now beetled over himself. At this hour ! And by such a route ! They must be mad; so he thought—forgetting himself. And now one of them was disabled—perhaps had disabled the whole of his party—had tethered it to the ice wall. The idea was frightful to Bell.

Another sound came. From somewhere not far overhead there broke, like an explosion, the singular cry that Swiss peasants and some mountaineers employ as a long-distance hail. No other noise of purely human production will carry so far. Harsh, wild and long, it starts, as the noise of a rocket does, at its maximum loudness, and then wails itself out in a dying fall that has an effect of collapse into despair. Though commonly uttered on quite cheerful occasions, it might be the passionate scream of some wretched animal terrified by the solitude of a desolate place and trying to empty into one impetuous lamentation all its burden of loneliness and desire.

Bell held his breath as the sinking shriek thinned away into silence. Then he counted off the seconds half-aloud, by guess-work, as bomb-throwers learnt how to do in the war. The count ran to seven—eight—nine, and just as Bell was muttering " Ten," the great yell smashed into the silence again.

Yes, he had expected that. Someone above was in the last extremity of danger—was trying the last shift of all, the most all-but-hopeless of all—was sending out the Alpine signal of distress into this stone and snow desert where autumn and night had joined to make it utterly certain that no answer would come. It was like praying to God, for dear life, that a well of fresh water might open itself in the dry middle of the Sahara.

Up to that point of time, as you have seen, Bell had been the kind of dual creature that most of us are for nearly the whole of our days. Part of him had toiled, sweated and ached, and another part of him had been sorry for that one. But, from the moment the second yell came, this two-fold arrangement was somehow abolished. All craving or need for any part of himself to be troubled about any other was over: now there was nothing at all to work out any more, no next move to be consciously planned, nor hesitant will to be coaxed or hustled, nor any plaguey choice to be made. All of the man was one unit at last, and it lived intently and intensely, moved by some force which it had no more desire to question than flames have to ask "Why burn upwards?"

The next mystery was that out of the mind so suddenly lightened there seemed, as it were, to overflow lightness into Bell's body of lead. Strangely empowered, his left foot was rising already to thrust itself into the next letter-box; almost gaily his right arm, freed from its preoccupation with pain, was beginning to hack a new handhold above. How long it took him to make it he could not have told, then or after. For time, too, was abolished; long trains of executive, practical thought could run on to their end instantaneously; courses, whole courses, of study of relevant things—the state of the ice, minute changes of gradient, the swift regelation following sun-down—were carried out without any sense of duration. One of the revelatory trances had come, in which even a plain man sees for once that an eternity need not be long and that in a single moment he may have everlasting life.

A minor, but still a piquant discovery was that he had never really known till now what it was to cut a good sizeable strip off that old margin of safety which he had imagined himself to have all but used up. His new letter-boxes now were marvels of sketchy adequacy; they were high art in the skimpiness of the means that they took to their end; triumphs of confident "cheek" to Nature; they bluffed that august power quite wittily. Almost before the vocalist overhead had completed the long S.O.S. of the mountains—it takes three minutes in all—Bell had his chest up to the dead centre of the bulge and saw what he had come for.

Some thirty feet higher up, a woman in mountain kit, with no axe and no hold for hand or foot, was dangling at a long rope's end. Her body revolved a little as it hung against the steep ice, but she was making no voluntary movement. The rope constricting her chest was held with one straining hand by a man perched eighty feet higher up. He was clearly unable to move, hand or foot, without being dragged off his stance by the weight of the woman. He stood on one foot—his right: it seemed to be firmly placed on a tiny step; and a little above his head, he had the pick of his axe driven well into the ice. To the steep bracket thus formed by the axe-head the man was holding on stoutly with his right hand.

The sorry sight explained itself. The woman must have been cutting steps down the slope; she must have slipped from a step, and dropped her axe with the shock. The man had checked her fall well, but both were hung up as immovably as a couple of stoats nailed to a gamekeeper's door. And now the rope must be slowly killing the woman. Just as Bell's head topped the bulge she called out in a strangled voice to the man, "Can you cut the rope, Teddy? I'm done, anyhow. Think of the kiddies. You *must*." The man held on.

Bell gave tongue as loudly as the dry brown fur lining his mouth would allow. "Well held, sir!" he roared. "It's all right. I'm coming."

Not once in a long and respectable Alpine career had Bell thought he would ever entrust his person to ledges quite so narrow as those on which he made the rest of his way up to that pendent woman. And yet he had never, in any hard place, felt such absolute freedom from any uneasiness. As he romped up, he sang out, at intervals. "There in three minutes," "Just two minutes more," "Only one minute now," "Half a shake—I'm just there." Then he arrived. He cut a big step close to where the woman's feet hung, planted his own

firmly on it, and then stooping and straightening up again, took the weight of her, sitting, on his right shoulder. Lest she be fainting he put up his right hand behind her, to hold her in place.

She was none of your fainters, though she was white, yellow, greenish, all the bad colours that beauty itself may have to put on in bad times. "She's a good 'un," Bell thought, as she sat quiet, panting.

"*You're* a great sportsman," she gasped, when she had breath enough.

Feeling all the weight off the rope of a sudden, the man above shouted down thickly, "Sure you have got her, sir?"

"Right as rain," she called up from her perch.

Bell added, "Leave the rope slack and dig in. We'll come up when you're comfy."

The man gave a tuneless yodel of joy and was plying his axe the same instant; chips and wedges of ice came pelting down from the great step that he must be cutting, from which to make the whole caravan fast. In five minutes he ceased hacking, braced himself, drew in the slack of the rope and announced that now he could hold up a cow for a day.

Bell let the woman cannily down till her feet found a trim ledge that he had managed to scratch out while holding her up. But some four or five feet of smooth ledgeless ice intervened between this and the lowest step the woman had cut, coming down, before she slipped off. Some new ones had to be made. "Care to cut em?" Bell asked. "Or shall I?"

She ruefully opened the hands in which no axe was now held. "I dropped it," she said, "like a mug. I feel sick with shame."

"Have mine," he said holding it out.

Her open boy face shone with joyous relief, as if at a gift of free absolution from sin. Even now their lives hung on this axe that he was entrusting to her, the convicted axe-dropper. She took it. "You're a very generous person," she said. "Now I'll unrope, and go up by myself, and you shall tie on."

He shook his head firmly. "You mustn't unrope."

Her eyes broke out in a quick sparkle of anger. "You've *got* to rope up," she said, flushing. "I know that I've done a dud thing and can't preach. But what about you? Climbing alone! Coming up out of nowhere, almost at night! Up a worse slope than this beast! Think it bears looking into? Eh? Well, do you mean to rope up, or shall both of us climb in this way that you seem to think right?"

Bell fairly funked the scrutiny of the young woman's fiery simplicity. When once simplicity sets out to inquire, what else is so penetrating? "Well, you tie on in the middle," he said. "And I at the end."

"That's fair," she agreed. A few feet of spare rope were let down by her husband. In two or three minutes, at most, the man who would have shuffled off the mortal coil was securely girt with the most delectable of its loops, the cheerfullest symbol of human determination not to withdraw from the banquet of life—only to salt a dish now and then with a few little hazards.

¶

THE last daylight was gone when the three stood safe on the level roof of the ridge, scrunching its gritty, granular snow somewhat shyly, though partly kept in countenance by the dark, which is itself a shy, friendly thing. Bell, now a mere dual creature again, had been wondering, all the way up the last flight of ice stairs, how he could give these married lovers a chance to re-assert their lately threatened right to possession of each other's lips. Best, he thought, just to turn his back on them when he got up, and try to look busy, coiling the rope.

But they also seemed to have some sort of plan. The man was waiting above the last step, to shake Bell by the hand—really to shake him—and mumbling something which Bell did not desire to make out more clearly. The cup of his consternation was filled when the lady raised his disengaged hand to her lips, a gesture for which he had not been prepared by her vivacity lower down.

Then, with one silent consent, they all stampeded away from the key of emotion. "You travel light, sir," said Bell, just to say something trivial. The other two seemed to carry not so much as a prune or a biscuit between them.

"Well——" said the man, and then Bell imagined the two must be having a quiet laugh in the dark.

"Oh! I know I can't talk," Bell admitted. "The fact is, I didn't expect to be coming right over the pass."

"Same here," said the man. "We just

walked up from Randa—meant to go only as far as the hut for the Weisshorn, eat our sandwiches there and go back to dinner. Then—it *was* rather mad, but the snow was so toppingly good—we thought we might just rush the Scallijoch before dark, sleep at Zinal and come back to-morrow."

"Gosh! it was rash!" exclaimed Bell, off his guard. He felt sure, the next instant, the man was quite seeing the humour of such a rebuke from such a sinner. Hastily trying to cover the slip, Bell made another. He asked, "How on earth did you miss the way down?"

The man didn't exactly say, "How did *you* miss the way up?" but he did say, "Yes, it was stupid, but—well, you know how it isn't so easy to see a way down from above as it is from below?"

"Hadn't we better push off?" said Bell rather hurriedly. "We'll be getting friz up here." But it was not the cold that he minded. It was the heat. It felt as if he couldn't move his tongue without burning his fingers.

The three truants had luck. Just such a full moon as they needed, not having a lantern, was on the point of rising from behind the snowy mass of the Mischabel, beyond the forest glen of the Visp. The mounting light could no longer contain itself. Its bright animation was pulsing up the dark violet of the sky in tremulous waves. It would be easy, by such a light as was coming, to follow the downward track left by the couple on their way up, almost to the door of the old Weisshorn hut, a refuge squat, squalid, flea-haunted and cramped, but divinely rich in raw materials for manufacturing heat, against a long night of hard frost.

At any time it is rather exciting to walk in the dark, and in silence, with anyone whom you like but don't yet know very well. What is he thinking about? You? And, if so, in what way? Barring you? Liking you? Wanting to throw down the conventional fence and talk frankly? An hour or two of this blindfold contact between mind and mind may so work on them both that when their eyes meet under a lamp at the end of the walk it may feel as if they had had a long and intimate conversation, leaving each of them just slightly anxious to know that the other has taken nothing amiss. Even thus, with friendly and deprecating looks, did they regard each other by candle-light two hours later, among the strong shadows and smells of the hut.

In ten minutes more the man's wife, who had walked like a true Joan of Arc, was exercising the blessed privilege of healthy tired young people of thirty or so. While she slept like a prosperous babe, her man and Bell smoked as they lay in the hay at the big sleeping-shelf's other end. Smoking helps to keep talk good. A man can puff at his pipe between each thing he really wants to say and the next. No gap-filling rubble is required.

Bell ascertained first that the man's name was Gollen and that he was a doctor—the Harley Street species of doctor. Bell gave in return his own name and description. Then they enjoyed one of those unembarrassing pauses. Then Bell said, somewhat brusquely: "There's one thing we have to get straight."

"Go it," said Gollen.

"You seem to imagine you're under some sort of obligation to me."

"Well, you see, we're alive. And, before you appeared, our number was up."

"So was mine."

"Oh, everyone's is, in a sense! 'All condemned to death,' doesn't somebody say, 'with an indefinite reprieve'? But ours wasn't indefinite. We were booked to go West in five minutes."

"I was to do it in one. In less. I should have dropped off my holds in ten seconds if you people hadn't blown in."

"Hullo?"

"Sure thing. I was done. I had never known until then how far doneness could go. That's how it felt, anyhow. Then your wife's axe came along. That by itself held me on for a jiffy or two. And then you hollered—gad! you *can* holler—and everything changed. There was something new in me, or around me, at work on me, somehow. Every bit of soreness and worry and funk was taken right off me—nothing was left in the world but one energy—just an enveloping, mastering sort of a push. It went up like a flame and it took me along—it made everything easy and light. And it wasn't only a thing in the mind. Old brother body himself was roped into the movement: some of the waft of this impulse seemed to get itself into my muscles. D'you follow these ravings?"

"Rather. Physicians aren't the fools that they were. We don't go on missing out what the mind—or the soul, if you like—

has to say to all the dynamic affairs of the body."

Bell puffed his pipe for a while. Then he said: "See? That's how you two preserved me. So, if thanking is what we're about, thank y' kindly."

Gollen, too, smoked in silence for the next minute or two, before asking: "The ice overhung where you were when I first caterwauled?"

"Can't tell you the angle. Hadn't got a clinometer thing. Of course, it wasn't a motoring road."

Gollen laughed. Bell liked Gollen's face when he laughed, so far as it could be seen among the tangle of wry shadows thrown about the hut by a small flame that still leapt in the stove. Gollen's face made Bell think of a trade term—"good ordinary." He had blunt, goodish features, strong and good-tempered. A straight, friendly man, you would say, and easily amused; a good man to be in a hole with. Bell enjoyed such men. They made the world go round. As he was thinking so, Gollen suddenly asked: "I say—why did you do it?"

As Bell did not answer at once, Gollen added: "Of course, it's cheek—asking. Tell me to go to hell, if you like, and I'll warmly approve. Only—well, I'm a doctor."

Bell cut the thing short. He answered at once what Gollen might go on to ask in another few minutes: "Yes—the springs running dry. The salt losing its savour, you know—the wine going flat. And worse coming."

Again Gollen did the bold thing. "Any particular evil?" he said.

Bell liked the man. And when two men would both have been dead a few hours ago if either had failed at a pinch, they may soon get on terms. Bell avowed the whole business—his symptoms, his surmises and disgusts, and his specious experiment.

Gollen listened as wise doctors do. "Did that numbness cramp you to-day?" he asked, at the end.

"No. But it was there all the day—except just the time—ten minutes or so, I suppose—when——" Bell hesitated for a moment.

"When you were in action?" said Gollen.

"Action?"

"Oh, I don't mean just doing violent things out of doors—pressing triggers or lassoing cows! I mean getting every Jack fibre there is in your nature alive and utterly turned on to something outside you—absorbed in it, lost in it—every bit of your consciousness taken up into some ecstasy of endeavour that's passion and peace."

Bell nodded, and Gollen went on. "I guess the great artists—all sorts of 'em—know how to bring the fit on, or it comes when they're at the top of their form—they seem to get further and further above 'emselves—hold the note out in a way that we can't—bring every tissue they have in their being to bear on the effort to get a wee touch to come right. Saints too, I suppose—the pukka ones, like Francis, the man at Assisi: they have the knack too; they can get more alive; they've found how to exist at a sort of top pressure. I fancy all of us get just a glimpse of the thing now and then—of what living *might* be, you know—at a great turn in a game, or when we're in love, or if some beautiful thing in a book bowls us over. Only, we can't hold the note, or we can't do it yet; the pitch is too high for our reach; so we flop back into flatness. But we shall get there, I do believe that. What we've done since we started as jelly-fish is to get more and more of ourselves into action, and we shall go on till we are as much more in action—real, true action—than now as we are now than when we were jelly-fish. Why, in a few thousand years we may all be able to live half our time as you lived to-day for ten minutes."

"Something in that," Bell assented.

Gollen apologised meekly. "Sorry to verge upon 'uplift.' Still, one can't always bother about the convention that talk has got to be pessimist piffle."

Bell nodded. Reigning conventions had few less dutiful followers than he.

They smoked again for a while. Presently Gollen said "How goes the weather?" He rose and opened the door of the hut very quietly. Bell followed him out to the hut's tiny terrace.

Nothing at all was wrong with the night. Beyond the queenly white shape of Mont Rose the moon rode gloriously high, burnished and flashing with frost, above sleeping Lombardy. Crowned in new snow and bejewelled with sparkles of light, the Weisshorn, the greatest great lady in nature, looked as lovely to Bell as when the first sight of her pale supreme grace had taken his breath away in his youth. At the height where they stood the frost had

silenced every trickle of water, leaving all space to be filled with subtler challenges to the ear. The air almost crackled with crispness; it was alive with the massed animation of millions of infinitesimal crystallisations. The Schalliberg Glacier, a little away to their right, had its own living whisper, the sum of the innumerable tiny creaks and fractures of its jostling molecules of ice. Up here, where the quiet of night was suffused with this audible stir of the forces fashioning the earth, it felt as if some murmurous joint voice of all existence were abroad and life itself were trying to make its high urgency felt.

"Pretty good," Gollen said presently.

"Yes, it's all right," answered Bell.

Gollen waited a minute or two. Then he asked, "Is it all right—enough?"

"Oh, yes," said Bell, "I'm sticking on."

## *The Amiable Frailty*

IT is impossible to count all the varieties of vanity. LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

ALMOST everybody is capable of thinking he has done more than another deserves, while the other thinks he had received less than he deserves. POPE.

CONCEIT is the finest armour a man can wear. J. K. JEROME.

THE only passion natural to man is self-love or "amour-propre" taken in an extended sense. ROUSSEAU.

VANITY is an able machine if it operates to benevolence. HORACE WALPOLE.

SELF-LOVE may be, and as a fact often is, the first impulse that drives a man to seek to become morally and religiously better. J. C. SHARP.

THERE is no vice or folly that requires so much nicety and skill to manage as vanity. SWIFT.

EVERY mortal longs for his parade-place; would still wish at banquets, to be master of some seat or other wherein to overtop this or that plucked goose of the neighbourhood. CARLYLE.

THERE is nothing as agonising to the fine skin of truth as the application of a rough truth. BULWER LYTTON.

CHARMS which, like flowers, lie on the surface and always glitter, easily produce vanity; whereas other excellencies, which lie deep like gold and are discovered with difficulty, leave their possessors modest and proud. JEAN PAUL.

# The Man Higher Up

*A fool and his money—*

By O. HENRY

ACROSS our two dishes of spaghetti, in a corner of Provenzano's restaurant, Jeff Peters was explaining to me the three kinds of graft.

Every winter Jeff comes to New York to eat spaghetti, to watch the shipping in East River from the depths of his chinchilla overcoat, and to lay in a supply of Chicago-made clothing at one of the Fulton Street stores. During the other three seasons he may be found further west—his range is from Spokane to Tampa. In his profession he takes a pride which he supports and defends with a serious and unique philosophy of ethics. His profession is no new one. He is an incorporated, uncapitalised, unlimited asylum for the reception of the restless and unwise dollars of his fellow-men.

In the wilderness of stone in which Jeff seeks his annual lonely holiday he is glad to palaver of his many adventures, as a boy will whistle after sundown in a wood. Wherefore, I mark on my calendar the time of his coming, and open a question of privilege at Provenzano's concerning the little wine-stained table in the corner between the rakish rubber plant and the framed palazzio della something on the wall.

"There are two kinds of grafts," said Jeff, "that ought to be wiped out by law. I mean Wall Street speculation, and burglary."

"Nearly everybody will agree with you as to one of them," said I, with a laugh.

"Well, burglary ought to be wiped out too," said Jeff; and I wondered whether the laugh had been redundant.

"About three months ago," said Jeff, "it was my privilege to become familiar with a sample of each of the aforesaid branches of illegitimate art. I was *sine qua grata* with a member of the house-breakers' union and one of the John D. Napoleons of finance at the same time."

"Interesting combination," said I, with a yawn. "Did I tell you I bagged a duck and a ground-squirrel at one shot last week over in the Ramapos?" I knew well how to draw Jeff's stories.

"Let me tell you first about these barnacles that clog the wheels of society by poisoning the springs of rectitude with their upas-like eye," said Jeff, with the pure gleam of the muck-raker in his own.

"As I said, three months ago I got into bad company. There are two times in a man's life when he does this—when he's dead broke, and when he's rich.

"Now and then the most legitimate business runs out of luck. It was out in Arkansas I made the wrong turn at a cross-road, and drives into this town of Peavine by mistake. It seems I had already assaulted and disfigured Peavine the spring of the year before. I had sold six-hundred dollars' worth of young fruit trees there—plums, cherries, peaches and pears. The Peaviners were keeping an eye on the country road and hoping I might pass that way again. I drove down Main Street as far as the Crystal Palace drug-store before I realised I had committed ambush upon myself and my white horse Bill.

"The Peaviners took me by surprise and Bill by the bridle, and began a conversation that wasn't entirely disassociated with the subject of fruit trees. A committee of 'em ran some trace-chains through the armholes of my vest, and escorted me through their gardens and orchards.

"Their fruit trees hadn't lived up to their labels. Most of 'em had turned out to be persimmons and dogwoods, with a grove or two of blackjacks and poplars. The only one that showed any signs of bearing anything was a fine young cotton-wood that had put forth a hornet's nest and half of an old corset-cover.

"The Peaviners protracted our fruitless stroll to the edge of town. They took my watch and money on account; and they kept Bill and the wagon as hostages. They

said the first time one of them dogwood trees put forth an Amsden's June peach I might come back and get my things. Then they took off the trace-chains and jerked their thumbs in the direction of the Rocky Mountains; and I struck a Lewis and Clark lope for the swollen rivers and impenetrable forests.

"When I regained intellectualness I found myself walking into an unidentified town on the A., T. & S. F. railroad. The Peaviners hadn't left anything in my pockets except a plug of chewing—they wasn't after my life—and that saved it. I bit off a chunk and sits down on a pile of ties by the track to recogitate my sensations of thought and perspicacity.

"And then along comes a fast freight which slows up a little at the town; and off of it drops a black bundle that rolls for twenty yards in a cloud of dust and then gets up and begins to spit soft coal and interjections. I see it is a young man broad across the face, dressed more for Pullmans than freights, and with a cheerful kind of smile in spite of it all that made Phœbe Snow's job look like a chimney-sweep's.

"'Fall off?' says I.

"'Nunk,' says he. 'Got off. Arrived at my destination. What town is this?'

"'Haven't looked it up on the map yet,' says I. 'I got in about five minutes before you did. How does it strike you?'

"'Hard,' says he, twisting one of his arms around. 'I believe that shoulder—no, it's all right.'

"He stoops over to brush the dust off his clothes, when out of his pocket drops a fine, nine-inch burglar's steel jimmy. He picks it up and looks at me sharp, and then grins and holds out his hand.

"'Brother,' says he, 'greetings. Didn't I see you in Southern Missouri last summer selling coloured sand at half-a-dollar a teaspoonful to put into lamps to keep the oil from exploding?'

"'Oil,' says I, 'never explodes. It's the gas that forms that explodes.' But I shake hands with him, anyway.

"'My name's Bill Bassett,' says he to me, 'and if you'll call it professional pride instead of conceit, I'll inform you that you have the pleasure of meeting the best burglar that ever set a gum-shoe on ground drained by the Mississippi River.'

"Well, me and this Bill Bassett sits on the ties and exchanges brags as artists in kindred lines will do. It seems he didn't have a cent, either, and we went into close caucus. He explained why an able burglar sometimes had to travel on freights by telling me that a servant girl had played him false in Little Rock, and he was making a quick get-away.

"'It's part of my business,' says Bill Bassett, 'to play up the ruffles when I want to make a riffle as Raffles. 'Tis loves that makes the bit go 'round. Show me a house with the swag in it and a pretty parlourmaid, and you might as well call the silver melted down and sold, and me spilling truffles and that Château stuff on the napkin under my chin, while the police are calling it an inside job just because the old lady's nephew teaches a Bible class. I first make an impression on the girl,' says Bill, 'and when she lets me inside I make an impression on the locks. But this one in Little Rock done me,' says he. 'She saw me taking a trolley ride with another girl, and when I came round on the night she was to leave the door open for me it was fast. And I had keys made for the doors upstairs. But, no, sir. She had sure cut off my locks. She was a Delilah,' says Bill Bassett.

"It seems that Bill tried to break in anyhow with his jimmy, but the girl emitted a succession of bravura noises like the top-riders of a tally-ho, and Bill had to take all the hurdles between there and the depot. As he had no baggage they tried hard to check his departure, but he made a train that was just pulling out.

"'Well,' says Bill Bassett, when we had exchanged memoirs of our dead lives, 'I could eat. This town don't look like it was kept under a Yale lock. Suppose we commit some mild atrocity that will bring in temporary expense money. I don't suppose you've brought along any hair tonic or rolled-gold watch-chains, or similar law-defying swindles that you could sell on the plaza to the pikers of the paretic populace, have you?'

"'No,' says I, 'I left an elegant line of Patagonian diamond ear-rings and rainy-day sunbursts in my valise at Peavine. But they're to stay there till some of them black-gum trees begin to glut the market with yellow clings and Japanese plums. I reckon we can't count on them unless we take Luther Burbank in for a partner.'

"'Very well,' said Bassett, 'we'll do the best we can. Maybe after dark I'll

borrow a hairpin from some lady, and open the Farmers and Drovers Marine Bank with it.'

"While we were talking, up pulls a passenger train to the depot near by. A person in a high hat gets off on the wrong side of the train and comes tripping down the track towards us. He was a little, fat man with a big nose and rat's eyes, but dressed expensive, and carrying a hand-satchel careful, as if it had eggs or railroad bonds in it. He passes by us and keeps on down the track, not appearing to notice the town.

"'Come on,' says Bill Bassett to me, starting after him.

"'Where?' I asks.

"'Lordy!' says Bill, 'had you forgot you was in the desert? Didn't you see Colonel Manna drop down right before your eyes? Don't you hear the rustling of General Raven's wings? I'm surprised at you, Elijah.'

"We overtook the stranger in the edge of some woods, and, as it was after sundown and in a quiet place, nobody saw us stop him. Bill takes the silk hat off the man's head and brushes it with his sleeve and puts it back.

"'What does this mean, sir?' says the man.

"'When I wore one of these,' says Bill, 'and felt embarrassed, I always done that. Not having one now, I had to use yours. I hardly know how to begin, sir, in explaining our business with you, but I guess we'll try your pockets first.'

"Bill Bassett felt in all of them, and looked disgusted.

"'Not even a watch,' he says. 'Ain't you ashamed of yourself, you whited sculpture? Going about dressed like a head-waiter, and financed like a Count! You haven't even got car-fare. What did you do with your transfer?'

"The man speaks up and says he has no assets or valuables of any sort. But Bassett takes his hand-satchel and opens it. Out comes some collars and socks and a half a page of newspaper clipped out. Bill reads the clipping careful, and holds out his hand to the held-up party.

"'Brother,' says he, 'greetings! Accept the apologies of friends. I am Bill Bassett, the burglar. Mr. Peters, you must make the acquaintance of Mr. Alfred E. Ricks. Shake hands. Mr. Peters,' says Bill, 'stands about half-way between me and you, Mr. Ricks, in the line of havoc and corruption. He always gives something for the money he gets. I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Ricks—you and Mr. Peters. This is the first time I ever attended a full gathering of the National Synod of Sharks—housebreaking, swindling, and financiering all represented. Please examine Mr. Ricks's credentials, Mr. Peters.'

¶

"THE piece of newspaper that Bill Bassett handed me had a good picture of this Ricks on it. It was a Chicago paper, and it had obloquies of Ricks in every paragraph. By reading it over I harvested the intelligence that said alleged Ricks had laid off all that portion of the State of Florida that lies under water into town lots and sold 'em to alleged innocent investors from his magnificently furnished offices in Chicago. After he had taken in a hundred thousand or so dollars one of these fussy purchasers that are always making trouble—(I've had 'em actually try gold watches I've sold 'em with acid)—took a cheap excursion down to the land where it is always just before supper to look at his lot and see if it didn't need a new paling or two on the fence, and market a few lemons in time for the Christmas present trade. He hires a surveyor to find his lot for him. They run the line out and find the flourishing town of Paradise Hollow, so advertised, to be about forty rods and sixteen poles S., 27° E. of the middle of Lake Okeechobee. This man's lot was under thirty-six feet of water, and, besides, had been pre-empted so long by the alligators and gars that his title looked fishy.

"Naturally, the man goes back to Chicago and makes it as hot for Alfred E. Ricks as the morning after a prediction of snow by the weather bureau. Ricks defied the allegation, but he couldn't deny the alligators. One morning the papers came out with a column about it, and Ricks come out by the fire-escape. It seems the alleged authorities had beat him to the safe-deposit box where he kept his winnings, and Ricks has to westward ho! with only feet-wear and a dozen fifteen-and-a-half English pokes in his shopping bag. He happened to have some mileage left in his book, and that took him as far as the town in the wilderness where he was spilled out on me and Bill

Bassett as Elijah III with not a raven in sight for any of us.

"Then this Alfred E. Ricks lets out a squeak that he is hungry, too, and denies the hypothesis that he is good for the value, let alone the price, of a meal. And so, there was the three of us, representing, if we had a mind to draw syllogisms and parabolas, labour and trade and capital. Now, when trade has no capital there isn't a dicker to be made. And when capital has no money there's a stagnation in steak and onions. That put it up to the man with the jimmy.

"'Brother bushrangers,' says Bill Bassett, 'never yet, in trouble, did I desert a pal. Hard by, in yon wood, I seem to see unfurnished lodgings. Let us go there and wait till dark.'

"There was an old, deserted cabin in the grove, and we three took possession of it. After dark Bill Bassett tells us to wait, and goes out for half-an-hour. He comes back with a armful of bread and spare ribs and pies.

"'Panhandled 'em at a farm-house on Washita Avenue,' says he. 'Eat, drink and be leary.'

"The full moon was coming up bright, so we sat on the floor of the cabin and ate in the light of it. And this Bill Bassett begins to brag.

"'Sometimes,' says he, with his mouth full of country produce, 'I lose all patience with you people that think you are higher up in the profession than I am. Now, what could either of you have done in the present emergency to set us on our feet again? Could you do it, Ricksy?'

"'I must confess, Mr. Bassett,' says Ricks, speaking nearly inaudible out of a slice of pie, 'that at this immediate juncture I could not, perhaps, promote an enterprise to relieve the situation. Large operations, such as I direct, naturally require careful preparation in advance. I——'

"'I know, Ricksy,' breaks in Bill Bassett. 'You needn't finish. You need five-hundred dollars to make the first payment on a blond typewriter, and four roomsful of quartered oak furniture. And you need five-hundred dollars more for advertising contracts. And you need two weeks' time for the fish to begin to bite. Your line of relief would be about as useful in an emergency as advocating municipal ownership to cure a man suffocated by eighty-cent gas. And your graft ain't much swifter, Brother Peters,' he winds up.

"'Oh,' says I, 'I haven't seen you turn anything into gold with your wand yet, Mr. Good Fairy. Most anybody could rub the magic ring for a little left-over victuals.'

"'That was only getting the pumpkin ready,' says Bassett, braggy and cheerful. 'The coach and six'll drive up to the door before you know it, Miss Cinderella. Maybe you've got some scheme under your sleeve-holders that will give us a start.'

"'Son,' says I, 'I'm fifteen years older than you are, and young enough yet to take out an endowment policy. I've been broke before. We can see the lights of that town not half a mile away. I learned under Montague Silver, the greatest street man that ever spoke from a wagon. There are hundreds of men walking those streets this moment with grease-spots on their clothes. Give me a gasoline lamp, a dry-goods box, and a two-dollar bar of white castile soap, cut into little——'

"'Where's your two dollars?' snickered Bill Bassett into my discourse. There was no use arguing with that burglar.

"'No,' he goes on; 'you're both babes-in-the-wood. Finance has closed the mahogany desk, and trade has put the shutters up. Both of you look to labour to start the wheels going. All right. You admit it. To-night I'll show you what Bill Bassett can do.'

"Bassett tells me and Ricks not to leave the cabin till he comes back, even if it's daylight, and then he starts off toward town, whistling gay.

"This Alfred E. Ricks pulls off his shoes and his coat, lays a silk handkerchief over his hat, and lays down on the floor.

"'I think I will endeavour to secure a little slumber,' he squeaks. 'The day has been fatiguing. Good night, my dear Mr. Peters.'

"'My regards to Morpheus,' says I. 'I think I'll sit up a while.'

"About two o'clock, as near as I could guess by my watch in Peavine, home comes our labouring man and kicks up Ricks, and calls us to the streak of bright moonlight shining in the cabin door. Then he spreads out five packages of one-thousand dollars each on the floor, and begins to cackle over the nest-egg like a hen.

"'I'll tell you a few things about that

town,' says he. 'It's named Rocky Springs, and they're building a Masonic temple, and it looks like the Democratic candidate for mayor is going to get soaked by a Pop, and Judge Tucker's wife, who has been down with pleurisy, is some better. I had a talk on these lilliputian thesises before I could get a siphon in the fountain of knowledge that I was after. And there's a bank there called the Lumberman's Fidelity and Plowman's Savings Institution. It closed for business yesterday with twenty-three-thousand dollars cash on hand. It will open this morning with eighteen-thousand dollars —all silver—that's the reason I didn't bring more. There you are, trade and capital. Now, will you be bad?'

"'My young friend,' says Alfred E. Ricks, holding up his hands, 'have you robbed this bank? Dear me, dear me!'

"'You couldn't call it that,' says Bassett. '"Robbing" sounds harsh. All I had to do was to find out what street it was on. That town is so quiet that I could stand on the corner and hear the tumblers clicking in that safe lock—"right to 45; left twice to 80; right once to 60; left to 15"—as plain as the Yale captain giving orders in the football dialect. Now, boys,' says Bassett, 'this is an early rising town. They tell me the citizens are all up and stirring before daylight. I asked what for, and they said because breakfast was ready at that time. And what of merry Robin Hood? It must be Yoicks! and away with the tinkers' chorus. I'll stake you. How much do you want? Speak up, Capital.'

"'My dear young friend,' says this ground squirrel of a Ricks, standing on his hind legs and juggling nuts in his paws, 'I have friends in Denver who would assist me. If I had a hundred dollars I——'

"Bassett unpins a package of the currency and throws five twenties to Ricks.

"'Trade, how much?' he says to me.

"'Put your money up, Labour,' says I. 'I never yet drew upon honest toil for its hard-earned pittance. The dollars I get are surplus ones that are burning the pockets of damfools and greenhorns. When I stand on a street corner and sell a solid gold diamond ring to a yap for three dollars, I make just two dollars sixty cents. And I know he's going to give it to a girl in return for all the benefits accruing from a one-hundred-and-twenty-five dollar ring. His profits are one-hundred-and-twenty-two dollars. Which of us is the biggest faker?'

"'And when you sell a poor woman a pinch of sand for fifty cents to keep her lamp from exploding,' says Bassett, 'what do you figure her gross earnings to be, with sand at forty cents a ton?'

"'Listen,' says I. 'I instruct her to keep her lamp clean and well filled. If she does that it can't burst. And with the sand in it she knows it can't, and she don't worry. It's a kind of Industrial Christian Science. She pays fifty cents, and gets both Rockefeller and Mrs. Eddy on the job. It ain't everybody that can let the gold-dust twins do their work.'

"Alfred E. Ricks all but licks the dust off of Bill Bassett's shoes.

"'My dear young friend,' says he, 'I will never forget your generosity. Heaven will reward you. But let me implore you to turn from your ways of violence and crime.'

"'Mousie,' says Bill, 'the hole in the wainscoting for yours. Your dogmas and inculcations sound to me like the last words of a bicycle pump. What has your high moral, elevator-service system of pillage brought you to? Penuriousness and want. Even Brother Peters, who insists upon contaminating the art of robbery with theories of commerce and trade, admitted he was on the lift. Both of you live by the gilded rule. Brother Peters,' says Bill, 'you'd better choose a slice of this embalmed currency. You're welcome.'

"I told Bill Bassett once more to put his money in his pocket. I had never had the respect for burglary that some people have. I always gave something for the money I took, even if it was only some little trifle for a souvenir to remind 'em not to get caught again.

"And then Alfred E. Ricks grovels at Bill's feet again, and bids us adieu. He says he will have a team at a farm-house, and drive to the station below, and take the train for Denver. It salubrified the atmosphere when that lamentable bollworm took his departure. He was a disgrace to every non-industrial profession in the country. With all his big schemes and fine offices he had wound up unable even to get an honest meal except by the kindness of a strange and maybe unscrupulous burglar. I was glad to see him go, though I felt a little sorry for him, now that he was ruined for ever. What could such a man do without

a big capital to work with? Why, Alfred E. Ricks, as we left him, was as helpless as a turtle on its back. He couldn't have worked a scheme to beat a little girl out of a penny slate-pencil.

"When me and Bill Bassett was left alone I did a little sleight-of-mind turn in my head with a trade secret at the end of it. Thinks I, I'll show this Mr. Burglar Man the difference between business and labour. He had hurt some of my professional self-adulation by casting his Persians upon commerce and trade.

"'I won't take any of your money as a gift, Mr. Bassett,' says I to him, 'but if you'll pay my expenses as a travelling companion until we get out of the danger zone of the immoral deficit you have caused in this town's finances to-night, I'll be obliged.'

"Bill Bassett agreed to that, and we hiked westward as soon as we could catch a safe train.

"When we got to a town in Arizona called Los Perros I suggested that we once more try our luck on terra-cotta. That was the home of Montague Silver, my old instructor, now retired from business. I knew Monty would stake me to web money if I could show him a fly buzzing 'round in the locality. Bill Bassett said all towns looked alike to him as he worked mainly in the dark. So we got off the train in Los Perros, a fine little town in the silver region.

"I had an elegant little sure thing in the way of a commercial slungshot that I intended to hit Bassett behind the ear with. I wasn't going to take his money while he was asleep, but I was going to leave him with a lottery ticket that would represent in experience to him four-thousand seven-hundred-and-fifty-five dollars. I think that was the amount he had when we got off the train. But the first time I hinted to him about an investment, he turns on me and disencumbers himself of the following terms and expressions.

"'Brother Peters,' says he, 'it ain't a bad idea to go into an enterprise of some kind, as you suggest. I think I will. But if I do it will be such a cold proposition that nobody but Robert E. Peary and Charlie Fairbanks will be able to sit on the board of directors.'

"'I thought you might want to turn your money over,' says I.

"'I do,' says he, 'frequently. I can't sleep on one side all night. I'll tell you, Brother Peters, says he, 'I'm going to start a poker room. I don't seem to care for the humdrum in swindling, such as peddling egg-beaters and working off breakfast food on Barnum and Bailey for sawdust to strew in their circus rings. But the gambling business,' says he, 'from the profitable side of the table is a good compromise between swiping silver spoons and selling penwipers at a Waldorf-Astoria charity bazaar.'

"'Then,' says I, Mr. Bassett, you don't care to talk over my little business proposition?'

"'Why,' says he, 'do you know, you can't get a Pasteur institute to start up within fifty miles of where I live. I bite so seldom.'

¶

"SO, Bassett rents a room over a saloon and looks around for some furniture and chromos. The same night I went to Monty Silver's house, and he let me have two-hundred dollars on my prospects. Then I went to the only store in Los Perros that sold playing cards and bought every deck in the house. The next morning when the store opened I was there bringing all the cards back with me. I said that my partner that was going to back me in the game had changed his mind; and I wanted to sell the cards back again. The storekeeper took 'em at half price.

"Yes, I was seventy-five dollars loser up to that time. But while I had the cards that night I marked every one in every deck. That was labour. And then trade and commerce had their innings, and the bread I had cast upon the waters began to come back in the form of cottage pudding with wine sauce.

"Of course I was among the first to buy chips at Bill Bassett's game. He had bought the only cards there was to be had in town, and I knew the back of every one of them better than I know the back of my head when the barber shows me my haircut in the two mirrors.

"When the game closed I had the five-thousand and a few odd dollars, and all Bill Bassett had was the wanderlust and a black cat he had bought for a mascot. Bill shook hands with me when I left.

"'Brother Peters,' says he, 'I have no business being in business. I was preordained to labour. When a No. 1 burglar tries to make a James out of his

jimmy he perpetrates an improfundity. You have a well-oiled and efficacious system of luck at cards,' says he. 'Peace go with you.' And I never afterward sees Bill Bassett again."

"Well, Jeff," said I, when the Autolycan adventurer seemed to have divulged the gist of his tale, "I hope you took care of the money. That would be a respecta—that is a considerable working capital if you should choose some day to settle down to some sort of regular business."

"Me?" said Jeff virtuously. "You can bet I've taken care of that five-thousand."

He tapped his coat over the region of his chest exultantly.

"Gold mining stock," he explained, "every cent of it. Shares par value one dollar. Bound to go up five-hundred per cent. within a year. Non-assessable. The Blue Gopher Mine. Just discovered a month ago. Better get in yourself if you've any spare dollars on hand."

"Sometimes," said I, "these mines are not——"

"Oh, this one's solid as an old goose," said Jeff. "Fifty-thousand dollars' worth of ore in sight, and ten per cent. monthly earnings guaranteed."

He drew a long envelope from his pocket and cast it on the table.

"Always carry it with me," said he. "So the burglar can't corrupt or the capitalist break in and water it."

"I looked at the beautifully engraved certificate of stock.

"In Colorado, I see," said I. "And, by the way, Jeff, what was the name of the little man who went to Denver—the one you and Bill met at the station?"

"Alfred E. Ricks," said Jeff, "was the toad's designation."

"I see," said I, "the president of this mining company signs himself A. L. Fredericks. I was wondering——"

"Let me see that stock," said Jeff quickly, almost snatching it from me.

To mitigate, even though slightly, the embarrassment I summoned the waiter and ordered another bottle of the Barbera. I thought it was the least I could do.

## *THE CALL OF THE ROAD*

THE long lone road is calling me and I am going soon
To where the stately beeches are like tall cathedral spires,
And the soughing of the wind is like a half-forgotten tune
That falls in dreamy cadence and is all the heart desires.

Soon will I be treading where the walls are old and grey,
Swish! among the waving grass that shimmers in the sun,
Seeking but a friendly hedge along a moonlit way
When light begins to deepen and the long day's tramp is done.

Beauty of the earth is there and scents upon the night,
Buffet of wind and far-flung space, and long-drawn silences,
And sanctuary is waiting where the lone road glistens white
For those who seek enchanted trails where new-born laughter is.

R. FORTESCUE DORIA.

# The Love Story of Edwin Binns

*An "undesirable" who found the one thing needful*

**By I. A. R. WYLIE**

LIEUTENANT OSWALD and his brother-in-arms, Second Lieutenant Somers, stood together on the steps of the base hospital. They were both what may be described as "artistically wounded"—that is to say, Lieutenant Oswald's right arm rested in a neat black sling, and a white bandage across Second Lieutenant Somers's brow, far from detracting from that young gentleman's undeniable good looks, lent them an additional and martial distinction. As he observed himself, "they both looked as though they'd come out of an idiotic novelette."

"Still, it's good to think we aren't scrapped," he added, fearful that the Unseen Powers which govern the destinies of second lieutenants might mistake his remark for a complaint. "We'll be back in a month."

"And it's good to think we shall have a glimpse of 'em at home," Oswald remarked, who, being married, saw the thing from two, not to say three points of view. "They'll be glad, by Jove!"

Somers nodded.

"By Jove, yes!" he agreed, and added reminiscently, "Poor old mater!"

Both were silent. Though feigning indifference after the manner of their kind, their eyes wandered persistently down the long muddy road which led to the station, and as a horseman appeared suddenly round the distant bend both simultaneously threw away their cigarettes, and then, perceiving that they had betrayed themselves, searched their pockets for a fresh supply.

"Beastly late, isn't he?" Somers grumbled.

"You can't expect your mail with your shaving water," Oswald grinned. "Anyhow, you'll soon be able to answer in person, old chap."

As they waited a third man joined them. They did not notice him at first, and he stood awkwardly apart, watching the dilatory horseman with a moody interest. His accidental isolation was accentuated by something in his personality. It was a "something" at once subtle and flagrant. Though he wore the same uniform, the same badges as the two men in front of him, he looked as though he had been cast in a different mould, and not even the democratic all-levelling khaki could conceal the fact. He was small, neatly made enough, and his kit proclaimed the Bond Street military tailor at the top of its voice. The difference expressed itself most clearly perhaps in the small waxed moustache, in the red, clumsy-looking hand which caressed it, and in his whole attitude of forced ease. But for the merciful uniform he might have been a shop assistant posing for his photograph in his Sunday clothes.

Presently he coughed affectedly, and Somers glanced round.

"Hallo, Binns, that you?" he asked, with good-natured fatuity. "Looking for letters?"

"Yes." The answer sounded at once sullen and pleased, as though he had not expected to be spoken to. "It's all the excitement one gets in this beastly hole."

"There's excitement enough elsewhere for any one who likes it," Oswald remarked carelessly. "Now then, sergeant, what's the bag?"

The amateur postman swung himself off his horse and saluted with a grin.

"I've got a nice little lot here for you, sir. I thought you'd be waiting."

"Thanks. By Jove, how's that for a nice haul! Look at it, Somers, you poor neglected oaf!"

"Just you wait till you see mine! Hurry up, sergeant! Think of those poor blighters inside with their temperature racing up the thermometer with longing for you. There, look at that! Only three! Fickleness, thy name is woman!"

The sergeant's grin persisted as he

gathered up his mail bags. It was obvious that he appreciated his position as benign and beneficent deity, but as he turned to the doorway he stiffened.

"No, sir; nothing for you to-day."

He passed on. Binns whistled between his teeth with a clumsy schoolboy's assumption of indifference, and held his ground as though the arrival of the mail had only been one of his reasons for lingering. Oswald, absorbed though he was in his own correspondence, looked up at him.

"Bad luck!"

Binns laughed loudly.

"I'm getting accustomed to it. I've only had one letter since I've been out here—and that was from the girl I was engaged to, saying she'd broken off the engagement. Jolly, eh?"

The outbreak was on a level with the waxed moustache. It was inexpressibly vulgar, and neither of the two men knew what to do with it. In sheer awkwardness Somers became facetious.

"Why don't you stick an 'ad.' in *The Times?*" he suggested—"'Lonely young officer would be glad,' etc., etc. You'd get shoals of answers. Here, have a look at the papers, and tell us how the war's getting on."

He tossed a neatly folded packet across, and Binns caught it reluctantly. A dull angry flush had crept into his face, but he did not speak again, and presently the two men wandered off together, leaving him seated on the steps, his too immaculate head bent over the paper. Somers did not ask for its return.

"Queer chap," he observed carelessly. "What's he doing here? He isn't wounded, is he?"

"No; he was taken ill in the trenches." Oswald's tone suggested finality, but Somers had the persistency of youth and innocence.

"Ill?" he queried.

"Sick—sick as a dog."

"What? You don't mean—funk?"

"Good Lord, no." Oswald frowned irritably. "But they had to send him back. I don't think they know what to do with him. They're trying to get him an exchange. Clerical work, you know."

"Then it was——"

"Oh, shut up!" Oswald put in firmly. "Shut up!"

The next day, as the two men were boarding the train bound for some nameless French port, Somers felt a touch on his arm. He turned and saw Binns at his side—Binns flushed, panting and almost disarrayed.

"I say, would you mind——?"

"What—posting it. Not a bit."

"I'll give you the penny when——"

Somers escaped into the carriage.

"I won't forget. Good luck!"

As the train steamed out of the station he glanced casually at the envelope which had been thrust into his hand, and whistled to himself. Then, conscious that he had committed an indiscretion, he thrust the letter hurriedly into his pocket.

"It takes all sorts to make a world," he remarked philosophically and apparently apropos of nothing in particular.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Edwin Binns stood on the platform and watched the train disappear. He was still panting, and in the moment's heat and excitement seemed less vulgar. As he became conscious, however, that he was not the sole occupant of the station he drew himself up, fingered his moustache and strode off, at once shamefaced and inexpressibly self-satisfied.

A little group of Tommies, busy unloading looked up, and, though they had never set eyes on him before, they winked solemnly at each other as he passed.

It was a week later at the Piccadilly during the tea hour. Somers, who had chanced upon an antiquated number of *The Times*, had been looking down the "Killed in action," and his eyes passed on naturally to the "agony column."

"Well, I never!" he said.

"What's that?" Oswald asked.

They were waiting for Oswald's sister, who, so the joke ran in the family circle, had never kept an appointment punctually, not even at her birth, and both were rather irritably occupied with the papers.

"Oh, nothing!" Somers returned awkwardly.

"Well, you are an aggravating chap! What is it?"

Somers folded *The Times* neatly and stowed that bulky periodical into his coat pocket.

"There's your sister looking for us," he said with the unshakable urbanity displayed by nurses towards too inquisitive charges. "We'd better go and meet her."

Thus it came about that Oswald never saw the brief notice in the "agony column," and did not take his junior's jump to a somewhat unwarrantable conclusion.

The notice ran as follows:

A lonely and unpopular young officer at the front would be grateful if some one would write to him occasionally. Address, Box 257, *The Times*.

At the same moment that Somers had made the above discovery Lieutenant Edwin Binns entered his garret in the base hospital "somewhere in France." "Garret" is perhaps an ungrateful term. In the hospital the place was regarded as privileged, but architecturally there is no other way of describing it. It had been allotted to Binns under various pretexts. The medical officer in charge said that his complaint—it had a long name—would have a better chance in comparative solitude. It was not suggested, however, that Binns should be invalided home. The garret was, in point of fact, in the nature of a respite and a last chance.

Edwin Binns sat down on the camp bed under the slope of the roof. A candle burnt on a rickety little table beside him, and its unsteady flicker accentuated the nervous quiver at the corners of the unformed-looking mouth beneath the over-waxed moustache. He was breathing quickly, as though he had been running, and there was something sullenly exultant about him which was not attractive.

He held an unopened letter in his hand. The writing on the envelope was feminine and very neat. *The Times* had added the address, but the feminine handwriting dominated by its exquisiteness and character. Lieutenant Binns sneered a little and ripped the envelope roughly open.

My dear Undesirable,—

(That's what you would have me call you, I feel sure!) I never thought I should write intimately to any one whose very name was unknown to me—least of all to a "young and unpopular officer"—but many strange things have happened lately, and it seems to me that I shall never be really surprised again.

When I first saw your notice I smiled a little. It was so Byronic in its bitterness. You need not have wasted the word "young." In my mind's eye I could just see you waiting for letters that never came, gloomy and cynical, and hating every one because no one loved you. At first I was just amused. I thought so many nice women would take pity on you, and then, after a little—I must confess my imaginary picture of you haunted me—I grew less amused. Nowadays every one seems to have some one, and I thought how really lonely—yes, and unloved—a man must be to whom no one writes and who is driven to put such a notice in the paper—as you were. Unless, of course, it is just a joke—in which case you will have a good laugh over me.

But I am a woman and sentimental, and I am taking you seriously. I feel, perhaps, that among the many who will answer you I may be able to understand you best. Will you write and tell me about yourself? Tell me why you are lonely and unpopular. Count me as an invisible friend. I will be one to you if you need me."

The letter ended off abruptly with the signature "Fanny Desmond," and underneath, written very small, as though the writer had been shy of her own question,

"Have you no people—no mother to write to you!"

For many minutes Edwin Binns sat quite motionless with the letter in his hand, staring at it. The sneer had died from his lips, and the truculency had gone out of him. He looked like a clumsy, overgrown schoolboy, whose roughness had been rebuked by an unexpected gentleness. Then he got up and threw the letter on one side.

"Rot!" he said aloud.

He went over to the window, and, unfastening his Sam Browne belt, hung it up on a convenient nail. As he stood there a light flashed in the darkness outside, and he could hear the purr of a heavy car feeling its way cautiously along the muddy road. The sound held him. He recognised it. Every night it was there—so ordinary, so hideously ordinary. The London streets were full of it; but here, in this place, it had its own grim significance. Every little jolt, every little break in that purring rhythm meant something, and the black shadow behind the winking eye of light was full of an unnameable, unthinkable horror.

The ambulance!

Edwin Binns drew the curtain sharply across the window. He was shivering, and a cold sweat stood out on his white forehead. He went to the table, and, pulling out paper from a drawer, sat down to write. He began several times, and several times tore up what he had written. The crumpled-up letter with the neat handwriting lay beside him, and he unfolded and re-read it. After that he wrote quickly, yet jerkily, with every now and then a pause as though his words came with an effort.

Dear Miss Desmond,—

It was lucky for me you didn't leave it to the "other nice women." It seems they were all too nice to risk having anything to do with anything so questionable as an "undesirable." So yours was my only letter—the second I've had since I've been out here.

I dare say you were right to laugh at me, but it's been pretty beastly. One feels the loneliness worse out here than anywhere in the world, and I haven't deserved it more than other fellows. I put "unpopular" in

my " ad." because I wanted people to understand that I wasn't joking. But I'm not what you might think. I haven't done anything to deserve the cold shoulder as I get it. The whole trouble is that I'm just a square peg in a round hole. My father has a furniture shop in the North, and this is a smart regiment. Everybody's somebody except me. They took me because I'd money and they'd had awful losses, but they can't forgive me the shop. If you know anything about military folk you'll understand.

I didn't care so long as I was out in the trenches—then I had my men, who didn't mind what I was so long as I was a man—but I got wounded trying to pull some poor fellow out of the enemy's fire, and now I'm stuck here by myself. I haven't any one to write to me. My father's busy, and he didn't want me to go. Helen, my fiancée, has broken off our engagement. She was pleased enough to see me in my uniform, but she didn't like being left alone, and now she's picked up with some rotter who's skulking at home. I've never looked at another girl, and so now I haven't a soul.

That's the whole story. I got sick of being the only one never to get a letter, and so I put the " ad." in the paper. Will you write again ? I'd be awfully grateful if you would. It's made me feel quite jolly again. My wound doesn't bother half so much——".

He signed the letter hurriedly, as though it hurt him, and added, " My mother died years ago," as a postscript.

Then suddenly, to his own amazement, Lieutenant Edwin Binns dropped forward with his face on the smeared sheets of paper, and cried bitterly like a child.

## II

THE sergeant was a man well able to conceal his feelings on ordinary occasions, but for once in his life the surprise was too much for him, and he expressed himself briefly but emphatically.

" Bless me, if you haven't got the lot sir ! "

It was not strictly true, but the facts justified the exaggeration. Edwin Binns stood in the hospital vestibule, and stared at the collection on the table in front of him. There were square letters, and oblong letters, neat handwritings and scrawls, and actually one package of portentous shape.

Edwin Binns picked out the one envelope with the prim yet graceful inscription. His hand shook a little, and there was a mist before his eyes which reminded him of that black hour under shrapnel when he had known fear.

" Thank you, sergeant—thanks awfully."

The sergeant looked at him from under beetling brows. For the moment he disliked the little upstart lieutenant a degree less. The thanks had come so spontaneously, almost humbly, and there was no spurious self-confidence in the boy's eager bearing.

" Blessed if he hasn't got a girl, after all," the sergeant thought, as he made his way to the first ward. " Well, I wish 'er luck of 'im ! "

Edwin Binns went out on to the steps of the hospital. It was drizzling miserably, but he did not know it. He was only conscious of the fresh air against his burning face, and of an exquisite relief as though a weight had been lifted from his oppressed lungs. He sat down on the low parapet, and tore open the delicate mauve envelope.

MY DEAR UNHAPPY UNDESIRABLE,—

Shall I begin by telling you that I saw and recognised the stains on your letter to me, and that I cried over them ? You had the right to your tears, for you had your sorrows, and I had a right to mine because I am a woman with a woman's rather terrible power of making the sufferings of others her own. And now I am so glad I overcame my shyness at writing to an unknown young man, for what I felt instinctively is really true. I can help you a little because I understand. You are very lonely, and I am very lonely. I have lost every one I care for, and if anything happened to me to-morrow I do not think many tears would be shed. Isn't that a bond between us ?

You see, I am writing quite frankly about myself, too. Loneliness isn't always a fault—sometimes it's just chance. It's like that in your case, isn't it ? Or perhaps you are a little to blame—over-sensitive, shy, always looking for offence ? Do you carry " the shop " about with you in your thoughts ? I can't believe anyone else would ever think about it. After all, every man who fights for his country is a gentleman. That's how I look at it. And you fought bravely. One short line in your letter thrilled me. And, do you know, I was just a little proud, as though you were indeed my friend and I could claim the reflected glory of your valour ? So you see, you are not alone any more, and our friendship is already beginning to be a real thing.

As to Helen, your fiancée, one day she will understand what she has done and be ashamed. Perhaps she will come back, and, if she is worthy of you, I pray that she will; but, indeed, my own heart is sore against her. You did your duty, and a true woman understands duty as well as any man. And if she is not a true woman I begrudge her your loyalty.

Dear Undesirable, I have made a picture of you in my mind. I see you as very boyish-looking, with a round face and pink cheeks and rather sullen blue eyes. Not handsome at all—just a simple, straightforward boy—a boy any woman would be glad to call her son. Do you think me very sentimental ? But

there can be so little sentiment out there in your grim world that perhaps no harm is done.

If you write again tell me about your wound and the poor fellow you tried to save. Also tell me if there is anything you need. I have sent you all sorts of funny little offerings to-day, under disguised handwritings, so that the "other fellows" might turn green with jealousy——"

Edwin Binns crunched the letter in his hand. He had seen the surgeon-major in charge of the hospital coming up the steps, and he rose sharply to his feet, saluting, with the blood hammering in his temples and the old mist before his eyes.

The major returned the salute, made as if to pass on, and then came to a standstill, measuring the younger man with a cold intentness.

"How are you feeling?"

"Pretty fit, thanks, sir."

"Fit to go back to the regiment?"

There was a second's pause. Binn's eyes flickered.

"That's for you to say, sir."

The surgeon-major turned his head away.

"I'm not so sure. A man knows his own constitution best. Anyhow, we can't keep you here much longer. You're not wounded, and we haven't any room to spare. Besides, the men will begin to wonder. At the same time, it is not desirable for you or us that you should be taken ill again in the trenches."

The blood receded from Edwin Binns' cheeks, and then flowed back, mounting in a dark flood to his fair brows.

"No—sir."

"I dare say I could get you your discharge —or, at any rate, an exchange into a home force—on account of nervous disability. It could be done if you wished it." There was no answer. "Well, think it over—I can give you ten days to decide."

"Thank you, sir."

The major nodded in his direction without looking at him, and went on his way into the hospital.

Edwin Binns sat down again on the balustrade. He still held the letter crunched in his hand, but he did not look at it. His round, rather foolish face had a curious stupefied expression as though he had been struck between the eyes.

The dusk added itself to the sombreness of the low-hanging, saturated sky. Through the grey sheets of rising mist the lights of an approaching motor twinkled warmly. Edwin Binns did not see them. He did not hear the purr of the engine until it was so close that the grim-shaped vehicle already stood at the hospital steps. Two nurses glided past him. There was the sound of doors being swung open, muffled voices, the soft easy slide of a stretcher being drawn out. Then steps—cunning, carefully calculated steps. Four ghostly figures drew slowly out of the mist into the yellow light of the open doorway, bearing between them a white burden of terrible immobility and silence.

Edwin Binns crouched farther back, but the wounded man's face was towards him, and they saw each other. Edwin Binns put his hand to his mouth as though to stifle an irrepressible exclamation, but the white, tortured face expressed nothing—not even recognition.

Then the silent, pitiful procession passed on into the light.

## III

YOU mustn't write to me again. Not that you'll want to when you've read this. My last letter was just a pack of lies—a lot of humbug to keep me from going off my head with shame. Now I'm going to tell you the truth. I've got to. If you had written differently I might have gone on with it—now I can't.

I want to tell you that I deserve all I get. I put "unpopular" in my "ad." in a fit of decency. I wanted people to know what they were in for; now I'm going on with it. It's only fair. Yours was such a sweet letter. When I got it I thought at first it would be just a silly schoolgirl sort of thing, and I felt what an ass I'd been ever to want it. But, as I've told you, I'm the only fellow who doesn't get something by every mail, and even the sergeant used to smother a grin when I asked him if there was anything for me. He looked small to-day, though—and jolly surprised. He hates me—they all do. You will, too, when I've told you everything. But there—I'm getting incoherent. I'd better get on with it.

For one thing, I'm common. It's not my father's shop—it's me. I'm a bounder. I know I am. I look one, though I spent any amount on my kit; and everything I do is bounderish. It just comes out of me. And I make it worse by swanking horribly. My letter to you was all swank. I wanted to make out I was something different—rather a fine, misunderstood sort of chap—and I pulled it off. But I can't deceive the fellows here. It's not the shop they mind. They're not prigs. If I had fought decently—but I didn't.

I'm not wounded. It's awfully hard to tell you—but I broke down in the trenches, was so sick with sheer funk that they had to carry me off on a stretcher. Now they've got me here. Of course, every one knows. My sub. was brought in to-day with a bullet through his shoulder, and he wouldn't recognise me. Even

Helen guessed. I lied about her, too. She is the finest, straightest girl on earth. It was she who made me join. I didn't want to go—I'm not the fighting sort—but I had to choose between her and shirking. So I went. But it was no good. I didn't even try to deceive her—somehow one can't lie to the people one cares for—and she broke it off. I was awfully fond of her—you don't know how fond—and it's been pretty hard to feel that I shan't ever see her again—or anything. I think that makes it worse—to feel that no one cares a brass farthing. I'm an awful selfish brute, but I'd be glad if some one would be sorry if anything happened. But, of course, no one could now.

I don't know what's going to be done to me. I didn't actually run away, but I should run if I got the chance, and they know it. So they're giving me the chance to clear out altogether instead. If I do, it's the end of everything, and if I don't——

Anyhow, now you know what sort of fellow I am, and you can drop me like a hot coal. I shall quite understand. I didn't mean to tell you all this, but I can't humbug you. It's cost a lot. I'd have liked to be able to think of you as an "invisible friend," but I can't any more now. But I'm awfully grateful for what you've done. And though I shall tear your letters up, as I know you will wish, I shan't ever forget.

He signed "Edwin Binns," and folded the letter with a steady hand. His face looked stiff and grey, with all the youthful foolishness stamped out of it.

## IV

THE neat handwriting had lost its primness. It hurried across the delicately-tinted notepaper in quick, unsteady lines, as though the hand that held the pen had lost its cunning.

You mustn't clear out. You must go back to the regiment—to the trenches—and prove yourself a man. I do not believe that you are a coward. You would not have written to me as you did if you had been a coward. You would have gone on pretending. But you are so young. You did not know what death looked like, and it is harder for some to face than it is for others.

If I had been Helen I would have given you another chance. I would have been romantic and silly, and given you my gage to carry into the thick of battle. I would have called upon the best in you with all the strength of my love.

Dear, unhappy boy, keep my letters if they are of any value to you. Carry them with you when you go back—as you will go back. For you won't disappoint me. I have had so many disappointments. Lately they have weighed heavily on me. All the other women in the world—so it seemed to me—had husbands or sons or brothers or lovers of whom they might think with pride, for whom they might pray and work, whom they might remember.

Yes, even those who had only memory seemed enviable to me. I had no one. Now I have you. All the tenderness and pity and pride which I have carried useless in my heart I have given to you. You will not disappoint me. You will give me the right to pray for you, to glow with pride for you; even, if God wills, to mourn for you. We will look death in the face together and not flinch. We will not pretend that it is easy, but we will go on. Will it make the fight easier if I tell you that I care, that whatever you are, whatever you have been, I am your friend—in the proud thought of what you will be?

You are chivalrous, or you would not have hesitated to lie to me to the bitter end. You will not destroy a woman's trust——"

The door of the garret opened abruptly, and Edwin Binns lifted his eyes from the letter in his hand. Then he got up. The major nodded to him.

"I was on my rounds," he said, "and I thought I'd look you up. There's a batch of 'cures' going back to the trenches to-morrow, and it's up to you to decide whether you will go with them or accept my suggestion."

Edwin Binns returned the elder man's gaze without flinching. His clenched hand rested on the letter spread out on the table beside him.

"I would like to rejoin my regiment at once, sir."

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure that——?"

"I am quite sure that I shall return differently, or not at all."

The major turned to go, then came back. He seemed to have lost his chilly self-assurance, and to have become gruff and awkward. Abruptly he held out his hand.

"Well, I wish you luck!" he said.

## V

THE hospital "scratch band" broke into a swinging march, and filled the air with vigour and colour.

Where he sat before his rickety table Edwin Binns could hear the tramp of feet and eager voices calling to each other. It reminded him curiously of the breaking-up day at his old school, and he felt his pulses stir with an almost joyful excitement. And yet what they were going out to meet was the thing he feared—not death, that was less terrible, but fear itself, the vast, intangible Unknown.

He glanced at the little pile of neatly

written letters at his side, and then, as though the sight of them inspired him, he sat forward and began to write in a dashing, sprawling, boyish hand :

They are playing us off grandly—such a jolly row ; they're all amateurs, and the men are singing and whistling as though it were a school treat. In a quarter of an hour we shall be marched off. So this is perhaps my last letter to you. I have *your* letters here beside me, and in a minute I shall stow them away in my breast pocket, and carry them with me to death or honour. I'm sorry if this sounds silly and romantic ; but this is the romance of my life.

I've one thing to say to you before I go, and I dare say it because I *am* going. If I end decently, if I am less of a rotter and more of a man, it's because of you.

I've never seen you. I've made my picture of you—someone small and delicate, yet strong, with grey eyes, and a sweet mouth, and brown hair with lights in it. You may not be a bit like this—it makes no difference. I owe you everything. It's as though you had made me. And so I love you. You have given me your tenderness and pity ; I give you all I am and have. Even now I won't pretend anything. It's not the love I gave the woman I was to have married. That I can't give to anyone again ; but what I feel for you is something different—less or more—I don't know which. I only know that I thank God for you.

And so I am writing to ask you—if I return honourably, if I behave like a man—may I try to make you care for me ? I would not dare ask you this, but you spoke of your loneliness, and that gave me courage. If I could make you less lonely, if I could pay you back a little comfort you have given me—if I only could——

The bugle is calling. I shall not get your answer until things are settled for me one way or the other—or perhaps never. But the hope and dream of you will be with me always. You must not laugh at me if I tell you something. I feel like a knight-errant, and I carry my lady's gage against my heart. Please God I shall not fail her !

He closed the envelope quickly, thrust the letters into his pocket, and pulled open the door. The tramp of feet was still now, the voices silent. In the road outside the hospital a hundred men stood at attention.

Someone touched Edwin Binns on the shoulder. He turned and saw the pale, pain-wrought face of his old sub. close beside him.

" I crawled out to—to wish you luck ! " the boy whispered. " I heard you were off, and I gave the Poultice Major the slip."

" That was brickish of you."

" Not a bit. Shall I give your letter to post ? "

" Thanks awfully."

" So long ! "

" So long ! "

That was all. They shook hands. In the boy's eyes there was a vague understanding, a vague regret. Edwin Binns carried himself well. Two men had given him their hands—two men who knew. They, too, were giving him another chance.

The band broke into a jolly, somewhat jolty version of " Tipperary." There was a hoarse cheer from a window where a crowd of convalescents had gathered in defiance of law, military and otherwise.

Edwin Binns took his place at the head of the company. For the first time he was conscious of his oneness with these men. He no longer stood alone, isolated by the hidden spectre. They belonged to each other, they to him and he to them.

" Forward—march ! "

The " Poultice-Major " in his white coat, fresh from the operating table, saluted from the steps. And Edwin Binns took the salute proudly and almost gaily.

## VI

THE man talked incessantly. He was in great pain, and the nurse knew that until the moment came for the merciful hypodermic injection it was no good trying to silence him. Moreover, the five listeners on the five neat white beds on either side defied her authority. Their faces, deep in shadow, peered out towards the talker with a pathetic wistfulness, an utter self-forgetfulness which was stronger than suffering. The nurse shifted the light so that its yellow rays fell farther away from them. Then, with a trained deftness, she moved the garrulous one's pillows, easing his position.

" Th' parsons don't need to talk no more to us about 'ell," he said in his loud, rasping voice of pain. " We knows better than they ; we've been there. Three days of it, my Gawd, with the fire of it burstin' over our 'eads and the slush of it up to our knees, and the rats gnawin' at our vitals. Three days and not so much as a crust. At the end we was drinkin' the puddles 'cause they tasted of something ; but it didn't 'elp much. Some of the chaps were so weak they couldn't 'old their 'ands up."

" They should have sent up the Reserves," a voice growled out of the shadow. " Mortal flesh won't stand it, it won't."

" Ours did." The wounded man turned his head in the direction of the last speaker. " And wot do you know about Reserves,

you bloomin' body-snatcher?" he asked, irritably. "You can't do no conjuring tricks with Reserves. If Reserves ain't there, well, they ain't there, and there's an end of it. Besides, we was cut off, so to speak. The order to retire hadn't got to us, and it's my belief we'd been forgotten. A 'undred men or so ain't so noticeable as you'd think when there's millions at it, and there's been a bit of a muddle all round. Any'ow, there we was. First and second days we 'adn't time to breathe comfortably. 'Eaven knows 'ow many times the beggars came on at us, and more than once it was an 'and-to-'and conflict in the trenches. But we pushed 'em back some'ow. Then, on the third day it occurred to them they could do it cheaper. They got our range with their artillery——"

"Well, go on, cawn't cher?"

"It ain't pleasant," the narrator muttered. "It was a bull's eye for 'em, and no mistake. In five minutes 'alf of us was just blotted out. It was like a line of wet ink wot somebody's smeared their finger over. I got a bit of something in me shoulder, which knocked me silly for a bit. When I got me peeps clear again I saw wot 'ad 'appened—but there weren't no time for cursing. T'other chaps was massin' for an attack, thinkin' we was wiped out, and our capting—'e was a man, 'e was—'e said, 'Let 'em 'ave it, boys!' and we ups out of that trench and meets 'em 'alf-way! My! That was a scrap—and not cheap, either. When we gets back there weren't no capting. There weren't nothing left us but a bloomin' little pipsqueak of a lieutenant wot 'ad——" He stopped again, and the impatient voice broke out plaintively:

"Wot 'ad wot?"

"Never you mind!" The new-comer glanced scathingly in the direction of his tormentor. "You keep your nose out of the regiment's business, young feller. Anyw'y, me and me pal we looks at each other, and me pal ses, 'Wot's goin' to 'appen to us now? 'E ain't no good. Somebody'd better take 'im in 'and.' 'Right!' ses I. So I wriggles up to the little lieutenant chap, and me pal ses nice and fatherly like, ''Adn't we better clear out of this before they catch us again, sir?' And 'e looks round and swears 'orrible. 'You go to blazes, darn you!' ses 'e, 'but I ain't goin' to move out of this till I gets me orders.' Me and me pal we 'eard our jaws drop. 'Righto!' ses we, and we crawls back like woolly lambs."

He chuckled.

"Five minutes later and Jack Johnson came tearing our way, and it was all over. I got a knockout jab on me chin, and knew nothink till I woke up and found all our chaps round us. The reserves had come up just after the Jack Johnson, and saved the trench. But there wasn't much left of us. A chap 'oo looked as though 'e was somebody, and knew it, came along and wanted to know wot we was, and 'oo was the horficer in command, and our little pip-squeak, lookin' like nothin' livin', saluted with 'is left 'and—'is right seemed to have been whisked off, so to speak—and toppled over as though 'is back 'ad snapped. 'E was a man, 'e was."

A growl of assent came from the shadow.

"Don't see wot call you 'ave to call him a pipsqueak," the opposition persisted.

"'E *was* a pipsqueak," the wounded man retorted, "but *'e* became a man." He thought a moment, and then added: "The Lord knows 'ow it 'appens, but it does 'appen, more often than you'd think."

This time there was no answer. The door of the ward opened, and the doctor, followed by a night nurse, made his appearance. A silence of perfect innocency hovered over the suffering men. The nurse going off duty made her report and was about to take her departure when the doctor motioned her back.

"You might give No. 14 a look up," he said in an undertone. "He's too apathetic. Humour him a bit. Give him the news and his letters if he wants them."

"Very well, sir. Shall I tell him about—?"

"Yes, certainly."

The nurse slipped down the passage to the smaller ward. Here were the serious cases, screened off from each other, and very silent save now and then for an irrepressible sigh. Farthest from the door Edwin Binns lay, with his eyes fixed sightlessly on the ceiling. The shaded light threw a pale reflection on his upturned face. He was scarcely recognisable. The waxed moustache had vanished. The once round and ruddy cheeks were now white hollows, and the weak mouth had straightened into a line of pitiless repression. He seemed at once much older and much younger—much older in knowledge, much younger in his helplessness.

As the nurse entered he looked at her with a faint smile. She sat beside him, professionally cheerful and unemotional.

"Easier to-night?" she asked.

"Yes, thanks. But I shan't get my hand back."

"No, I'm afraid not. But you did enough with it to satisfy most people." She waited a moment, and then added, on the same steady, practical note: "You're mentioned in the dispatches, you know."

He looked at her intently. She saw the colour beat its way into his white face, but he said none of the things that men are supposed to say at such moments—neither "Rot!" nor "Whatever for?" A look that was ineffable in its content dawned in his pain-haunted eyes.

"She'll be jolly glad," he said.

The nurse looked at him wonderingly, and placed two letters on his bed.

"They're congratulations, I expect. You may read them if you want to. Shall I open them?"

"Please—I can't. This beastly one-handed business! If there's one with neat copper-plate writing give me that."

"Yes; here you are."

He took the letter open from her. There were two lines written across the sheet:

When you come back I will show you all I have to give you.

Edwin Binns smiled with a grave happiness. The letter slipped from his weak hold on to the counterpane.

"She's not like any other woman in the world," he said dreamily.

The nurse nodded. She thought he had become light-headed in the fitful way common to men recovering from severe injuries.

"And your other letter?" she asked.

"Oh, read it to me," he said indifferently.

The writing of the second letter was bold and vigorous and young.

I do not know whether you will want to hear from me again (the nurse read in her low, clear voice). When I think of my last letter I feel it would be only fair if you have put me out of your life. And yet in justice to you and to myself I must write and admit the wrong I did you in my ignorance. I loved you—but I did not understand you. When I wrote as I did I can honestly say I hurt myself most of all. I conceived it to be my duty. I felt, too, that there could be no real love between us if I could suspect you as I did. Now I know that I was wrong—wrong in my suspicion, wrong with regard to our love——

The nurse broke off. Edwin Binns, who for three weeks had lain as one dead, raised himself on his elbow and snatched the letter from her hand. For a moment, she watched him without alarm as he crouched there, his eyes devouring the closely written sheet with a passionate hunger. She believed in the efficacy of good news, and, woman-like, she thought she recognised the nature of the letter she had just read. But, as suddenly he fell back, she lost her sense of kindly certainty. The change in his face was something familiar and terrible. It was as though the feeble flame of his vitality had been stamped out. She bent over him, her fingers instinctively seeking his pulse.

"Why—*wasn't* it good news?" she whispered.

There was no answer for a moment. The beat under her fingers fluttered, and slowly, painfully steadied. At length Edwin Binns looked up at her.

"Yes—good news!" His lips moved soundlessly for a moment. "Only—too late!"

## VII

THEY sat opposite each other in the hotel lounge with the table between them, and beyond the man's crippled right arm and the girl's pallor there was little to distinguish them from the usual "pairs" that are a characteristic of London hotel lounges at teatime. Only an interested observer would have noticed that the food before them was untouched. The man sat forward with his head bent.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked for this," he said. "It's awful for us two to sit here knowing we care, and that we shan't see each other again. But I had to have it out with you—before I saw her. I couldn't let you think I had changed like that, or that I was just paying you back. You do see that, don't you, Helen?"

"Of course." She threw back her head a little, challenging her own weakness. "It's easier now. We can think of each other—and not feel bitter about it—or sorry we'd cared so much. I couldn't have borne that—now I can——"

"Can you?" He tried to laugh, and failed tragically. "Oh, my dear, if it had only been a little different. If *she* had been different—some silly doll who didn't really care. But I know she's not that sort. If she had been, then I shouldn't be here—I shouldn't have seen you again. That's the awful irony of it. She's given you back to me. She's made me——"

"As I might have done," the girl broke in, with bitter self-reproach.

He shook his head.

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps it was everything together—losing you and all that. I had to touch bottom first. Then she came and held out a helping hand. Helen, I've not deceived her. I told her I should love you above everything—always. But she believed it was all over between us—as I did. And she's lonely—desperately lonely. She's had a rotten time of it, I feel sure of that, and she was decent to me when I was pretty desperate. I couldn't go back on her now."

"I knew." She got up suddenly, as though at the end of her strength. "Do you think I'm a cad? I wouldn't hurt her—no, not even for you. I'm grateful to her. Whatever she is, whatever she is like, she's made a man of you. She did what I couldn't—wouldn't do. She deserves happiness; I don't. That's all." She held out her hand. "Please say good-bye. There's nothing else we can, or ought, to say to each other. And it's almost intolerable——"

"I know, dear. It's been my rotten folly—my cowardice——"

"No, no; I'm proud of you." She tried to smile.

"Helen, you're wonderful—more wonderful than my dreams of you!"

"Then she's made us proud of each other; she's made us love each other more. That's the terrible part of it. And we mustn't meet again."

"Helen, I shan't ever forget."

"Try to—you owe it her."

"I know. Good-bye, then."

Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. They looked at each other through a mist, not of tears, but of sheer physical exhaustion, as though the burden they carried had materialised. But outwardly they were palely composed. Thus they remained a moment, until suddenly she dropped his hand and turned away. He watched her stupidly, and it was not till some time after she had disappeared in the crowded vestibule that he seemed to awake to reality.

Edwin Binns sat upright in the corner of his taxi, a sheet of notepaper, covered with the delicate writing, pressed between his fingers, and prayed desperately.

The taxi drew up at the kerb with a jolt, and Edwin Binns got out. The big house looked up sombrely before him. An old woman neatly dressed in black, with a white apron, opened the door to him.

"Is Miss Fanny Desmond at home?" he asked.

The old, weary eyes studied him curiously.

"Are you a friend of Miss Desmond's, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then you haven't heard——"

"Heard? I only got home this morning."

"Miss Desmond died last night, sir."

A black veil dropped between his eyes and the old face in front of him. Something had struck him a stupefying blow between the brows, and he felt himself turn sick and faint. A hand laid itself on his arm, and he was drawn into the cool darkness of the house. Like a drunken man he followed the bent figure into a room full of shadows and the scent of flowers.

"You're Captain Binns, sir? I'm sorry; I didn't recognise you, but I expected you in uniform. *She* was expecting you, sir. Won't you sit down?"

He shook his head. He looked about him, and everywhere there was the work of her delicate hands, of her white thought and upright soul. Her presence was a real, all-pervading truth to him.

"Would you like to see her?"

He assented dumbly. The old woman opened the great folding doors. The room they entered seemed quite empty, save for what lay sleeping on the simple bed. There was no trace of death.

"She loved you very much, sir." The voice sounded afar off. "I was in her confidence and I knew. She wanted to write you, but the end came very suddenly. She gave me a message for you. I was to say that she was very proud of you, and that you'd made her very happy." There was a moment's silence, "You see, sir, all her friends had died—everyone she cared for. In these days she wanted someone of her own to be proud of—a son. She was very, very old, sir."

He nodded, making a gesture which she seemed to understand. He heard the door close.

Still he stood motionless by the sleeper, recognising his picture of her—the sweet, strong mouth, the serene forehead, the eyes, so noble even in their sheath of sleep. There were the white, fragile hands, crossed over a single lily.

What did the years matter?

Edwin Binns kissed her. He knelt down and buried his face in the flowers beside her.

# *Dancing*

## Every Age Has Danced

DANCING is very nearly as old as the world. The Hebrews danced when they emerged from the Red Sea, and about the golden calf, which was not their maiden effort. The young maidens of Silo were enjoying the dance in the field, when they were surprised by the youths of the tribe of Benjamin, and carried off by force according to the counsel of the ancients of Israel; David danced before the ark; Socrates learned dancing from Aspasia; the soldiers of Crete and of Sparta went dancing into an assault, etc. But we leave this point of anumated archæology to be resolved by others. Dancing probably originated in certain gestures which indicated contentment, pain, joy—just as music was born of certain analogous sounds. Plato, Socrates, Lycurgus, and others, held dancing in great veneration. We are further informed that in old Chinese books dancing and music are described as the two most important departments of public affairs. Under the Romans, however, dancing had degenerated; and we are reminded that Cicero addressed a grave reproach to the Consul Gabinus for having danced.

Sir Arthur Helps.

I COULD be pleased with any one,
Who entertained my sight with such gay shows
As men and women, moving here and there,
That coursing one another in their steps,
Have made their feet a tune.

John Dryden.

## A Test of Gentility

DANCING, though a silly, trifling thing, is one of those established follies which people of sense are sometimes obliged to conform too; and if they do, they should be able to do it well.

In dancing, the motion of the arms should be particularly attended to, as these decide a man's being genteel or otherwise, more than any other part of the body. A twist or stiffness in the wrist will make any man look awkward. If a man dances well from the waist upwards, wears his hat well, and moves his head properly, he dances well.

Lord Chesterfield.

## Innocent Familiarity

AS for country-dancing, it must indeed be confessed that the great familiarities between the two sexes on this occasion may sometimes produce very dangerous consequences; and I have often thought that few ladies' hearts are so obdurate as not to be melted by the charms of music, the force of motion, and a handsome young fellow who is continually playing before their eyes, and convincing them that he has the perfect use of all his limbs.

But as this kind of dance is the particular invention of our own country, and as every one is more or less a proficient in it, I would not discountenance it; but rather suppose it may be practised innocently by others, as well as myself, who am often partner to my landlady's eldest daughter.

Eustace Budgell.

## Contrasts in Partners

THE dance, like most dances after supper, was a merry one; some of the older folks joined in it, and the Squire himself figured down several couples with a partner with whom he affirmed he had danced at every Christmas for nearly half-a-century. Master Simon, who seemed to be a kind of connecting link between the old times and the new, and to be withal a little antiquated in the taste of his accomplishments, evidently piqued himself on his dancing, and was endeavouring to gain credit by the heel and toe, rigadoon, and other graces of the ancient school; but he had unluckily assorted himself with a little romping girl from boarding-school, who, by her wild vivacity, kept him continually on the stretch, and defeated all his sober attempts at elegance;—such are the ill-assorted matches to which antique gentlemen are unfortunately prone!

The young Oxonian, on the contrary, had led out one of his maiden aunts, on whom the rogue played a thousand little knaveries with impunity; he was full of practical jokes, and his delight was to tease his aunts and cousins; yet, like all madcap youngsters, he was a universal favourite among the women. The most interesting couple in the dance was the young officer and a ward of the Squire's, a beautiful blushing girl of seventeen. From several shy glances which I had noticed in the course of the evening, I suspected there was a little growing up between them; and, indeed, the young soldier was just the hero to captivate a romantic girl. He was tall, slender, and handsome, and like most young British officers of late years, had picked up various small accomplishments on the Continent—he could talk French and Italian—draw landscapes, sing very tolerably—dance divinely; but, above all, he had been wounded at Waterloo:—what girl of seventeen, well read in poetry and romance, could resist such a mirror of chivalry and perfection!

Washington Irving.

AH, love to speak was impotent,
Till music did a tongue confer,
And I ne'er knew what music meant,
Until I danced to it with her.

Coventry Patmore.

## An Art in the Making

IF some great genius would arise, and advance this art to that perfection it seems capable of receiving, what might not be expected from it? For if we consider the origin of arts and sciences, we shall find that some of them took rise from beginnings so mean and unpromising, that it is very wonderful to think that ever such surprising structures should have been raised upon such ordinary foundations. But what cannot a great genius effect? Who would have thought that the clangorous noise of a smith's hammers should have given the first rise to music? . . . Who knows, therefore, but motion, whether decorous or representative, may not (as it seems highly probable it may) be taken into consideration by some person capable of reducing it into a regular science, though not so demonstrative as that proceeding from sounds, yet sufficient to entitle it to a place among the magnified arts?

Sir Richard Steele.

## Festivities at a Peakland Farm

ALL to be seen by human eyes was sixteen gaily whirling figures in a maze of shining holly, and a young fiddler sawing madly on his fiddle strings and the concertina hurrying after.

"It is ondecent the way Tammas Patchett strides round his maiden," said Mrs. Carver falling back on that unlucky wight for gossip.

"Like a back-heeling wrostler," added Mrs. Stickles. "Leastways our Bill makes that of him, and though I know naught consarning wrostling myself, to my own mind, it is no less."

And she shook her head wisely.

Joan and I were dancing together again, and I saw her eyes at one point grow suddenly thoughtful, so that I asked if she felt weary, my heart drumming the while to a hundred alarums.

"No, no," she said, smiling to reassure me. "I was only thinking how, in this same farm kitchen, a century agone, feet just as happy and lightsome tripped along the sanded floor and tipped and circled as badly out of time to the same old tune . . ."

"Are thee *wob?*" Zeekel Patchett enquired of his partner, Lizzie Fletcher, as they jigged past my elbow, for truly it had become an exhausting dance."

The maiden gasped and said that she *was* "wob," sinking breathless on to the settee amid sympathetic applause.

Zeekel crossed over to Mrs. Carver, breaking in on a new rhapsody over my dancing pumps.

"Lizzie Anne Fletcher's blowed," said he, with great solemnity.

"That cooms of lacing corsiks too tight," snapped the Dame, with decision.

THOMAS MOULT.

BY Sudbury, by Sudbury, by little red-roofed Sudbury,
He wished to dance a mile with me! I made a courtly bow:
I fitted him with morrice-bells, with treble, bass and tenor bells,
And "*Tickle your tabor, Tom,*" I cried, "*we're going to market now.*"

And rollicking down the lanes we dashed, and frolicking up the hills we clashed,
And like a sail behind me flapped his great white frock a-while,
Till, with a gasp, he sank and swore that he could dance with me no more;
And—over the hedge a milk-maid laughed, *Not dance with him a mile?*

"You lout!" she laughed, "I'll leave my pail, and dance with him for cakes and ale!
I'll dance a mile for love," she laughed, "and win my wager, too.
Your feet are shod, and mine are bare; but when could leather dance on air?
A milk-maid's feet can fall as fair and light as falling dew."

I fitted her with morrice-bells, with treble, bass and tenor bells:
The fore-bells, as I linked them at her throat, how soft they sang!
Green linnets in a golden nest, they chirped and trembled on her breast,
And, faint as elfin blue-bells, at her nut-brown ankles rang.

ALFRED NOYES

## The Whole Art

THIS is the theory of dancing, to recover continually in changes the lost equilibrium, not by abrupt and angular but by gradual and curving movements.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

## A Matter of Etiquette

"BY Jove! This is hot work!" exclaimed Lawless, flinging himself down on a sofa so violently as to make an old lady, who occupied the farther end of it, jump to an extent which seriously disarranged an Anglo-Asiatic nondescript, believed in by her as a turban, wherewith she adorned her aged head. "If I have not been going the pace like a brick for the last two hours, it's a pity; what a girl that Di Clapperton is to step out!—splendid action she has, to be sure, and giving tongue all the time, too. She's in first-rate training, 'pon my word: I thought she'd have sewn me up at one time—the pace was terrific. I must walk into old Coleman's champagne before I make a fresh start; when I've recovered my wind, and got a mouthful of hay and water, I'll have at her again, and dance till all's blue before I give in."

"My dear fellow," said I, "you must not dance all the evening with the same young lady; you'll have her brother call upon you the first thing to-morrow morning to know your intentions."

"He shall very soon learn them as far as he is concerned, then," replied Lawless, doubling his fist. "Let me have him to myself for a quiet twenty minutes, and I'll send him home with such a face on him that his nearest relations will be puzzled to recognise him for the next month to come at least. But what do you really mean?"

"That it is not etiquette to go on dancing with one young lady the whole evening; you must ask some one else."

"Have all the bother to go over again, eh? What a treat! Well, we live and learn; it will require a few extra glasses of champagne to get the steam up to the necessary height, that's all."

FRANK E. SMEDLEY.

NOW around they go, and around and around,
With hop-skip-and-jump, and frolicsome bound,
Such sailing and gliding,
Such sinking and sliding,
Such lofty curvetting,
And grand pirouetting;
Ned, you would swear that Monsieur Gilbert
And Miss Taglioni were capering there!

And oh! such awful music! ne'er
Fell sounds so uncanny on mortal ear,
There were the tones of a dying man's groans
Mixed with the rattling of dead men's bones:
Had you heard the shrieks, and the squeals, and the squeaks,
You'd not have forgotten the sound for weeks.

And around, and around, and around they go,
Heel to heel, and toe to toe,
Prance and caper, curvet and wheel,
Toe to toe, and heel to heel.
"'Tis merry, 'tis merry, Cummers, I trow,
To dance thus beneath the nightshade bough!"

R. H. BARHAM.

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# The Lady of the Lift

*Concerning the resourceful personality of Madame Faivre*

By E. W. HORNUNG

IT was the Man from Winchester who gave her that name: the Man who was Swiss godfather and godmother to half the hotel. Whiskers and the Suffragite, the Meenister and the Limit, were a few more of his baptismal efforts; but it is only fair to state that he called us these things behind our respective backs, whereas we called him Man to his impudent little laughing face. The one exception to a redeeming rule was the Lady of the Lift, who delighted in her *nom d'hôtel* and made much of its inventor. The Man was in fact a sufficiently healthy and hearty specimen of the young barbarian; but though doubtless a very small molecule at Winchester, where he had but finished his first term, it must be confessed that there was a good deal of him at the Alpine haunt to which his people had brought him for the Christmas holidays.

It was one of those spots to which half one's friends flock nowadays in the latter part of December, to return with the complexions of Choctaws all too early in the New Year. A group of gay hotels, with as many balconies as a pagoda, and an unpopular annex in the background, had broken out upon a plateau among the dazzling peaks. Snow of an almost incandescent purity and brilliance rose in huge uncouth chunks against a tropically blue sky; the softened shapes of mountains lay buried underneath; and snow clung in great gouts to the fir-trees that bristled upon the lower slopes like darts from the blue. You had to freeze for hours on a sledge, skimming dizzy ledges, climbing all the time, to reach this fairy fastness from the nearest railway. But it was worth the freezing, even before the journey's end, if you made it by moonlight, as just before Christmas one did. And the hotels when you reached them (if only they really had reserved those rooms) were quite wonderfully managed and equipped: surely there are volumes in the fact that there was a lift in even one of them, a lift with a crimson velvet seat, where a poor lady could sit and watch the fun at nights, of it but not in it, and so not in the way at all, though accessible to chivalry, not otherwise engaged.

The poor lady! That was her life in the hotel; and everybody was sorry for her except herself. It seemed such a sad case. The exact trouble was unknown—she never spoke of herself—but its outward sign was a crutch. And her face was so young, and her hair so grey! But younger than her face was the whole spirit of the Lady of the Lift: her humour, her courage, her breezy outlook on life, her keen interest in everybody and everything. And the cruel part of it was that nature had cast her in athletic mould, that in fact she had excelled at those very sports which she was now constrained to watch at a distance from the bedroom balcony where she took her modicum of open air.

Madame Faivre she was called to her face; and her English was just a little broken. But who she had been formerly, who or what her husband, or any other detail of her sad life, nobody knew or even pretended to know, with the possible exception of old Whiskers, and he was both vague in his ideas and chary of expressing them.

Old Whiskers, so dubbed by young Winchester on account of a somewhat feline or Teutonic moustache, was an Alpine veteran who climbed in summer and curled in winter. He was understood to improve the equinoxes in some scholastic capacity at Oxford. The personality of Madame Faivre quite worried Whiskers for a day or two after his arrival; he could have sworn that he had met her somewhere, and so he told her with the easy modest sociability which made him another favourite himself.

"It was before I gave up skating," said Whiskers. "I can't help feeling that we've skated together, somewhere or other."

"It must have been many years ago," said Madame. "I also have given it up

quite young. I have had a weak ankle. I have to thank that ankle also for this crutch."

Whiskers felt embarrassed. He was, in fact, the first to be informed that the lady's infirmity was originally due to an accident; but he kept the information to himself and discussed Madame Faivre no more with his hotel acquaintances. He felt he had already committed a minor breach of tact and taste; he made amends with many little deferential attentions; but still the vague memory, the elusive association, would cause him a certain amount of mental exasperation whenever they met, as a riddle of no consequence that yet refused to be given up.

Then an old skating friend turned up, and was turned away, without so much as seeing the rooms he had engaged seven weeks before; but he did insist on having his lunch, and parenthetically he solved the mystery for Whiskers at a glance.

"Remember her! Why, of course I remember her; don't you?" And he whispered the maiden name for which Whiskers had racked his brain in vain.

But Whiskers was getting to the age at which memory begins to fail; he was not immediately the wiser.

"I seem to remember the name at Davos one year," he said. "Or was it St. Moritz?"

"Davos. I should think you did remember it!"

"Why?"

"Well, for one reason you used to skate with her every day; you were about the best pair there."

"So I told her!" cried Whiskers.

"You don't mean to say she denied it?"

"Certainly; no recollection whatever, so she said."

The old skating friend came up to Whiskers's good ear. They were waiting in the hall for lunch, and the lady as usual was waiting in the lift, had indeed gone up and down in it more than once rather than relinquish her favourite seat. But now she hung at anchor a few inches above the level of the hall, exchanging the sprightliest and kindest glances with all the hungry, bright red faces, just in from sun and snow.

"Of course, you know why she denies it?" whispered the old skating friend.

"I suppose she's forgotten me, too."

"Not she!"

"How long is it ago?"

"Seven or eight years, I suppose."

"That's it, then; we've both aged."

"She has, if you like!" said the skating friend. "She looks twenty years older—might be another woman altogether—but she isn't, by Jove! Don't look, but she's got her eye on us now."

She had, though she was rallying her young Man at the same time, and he her with perfectly unintelligible Winchester repartee. Whiskers begged his friend to refresh a treacherous memory.

"Well," began the other, "it was such a terrific scandal at the time. . . ."

Whiskers did remember the whole thing. It made him grave. His friend, about to be turned back through the snow, vowing an Englishman's vengeance in the *Times*, and really only distracted from his grievance by seeing and hearing about the Lady of the Lift, now took a mordant satisfaction in pouring vitriolic comments on the forgotten scandal into the good ear that Whiskers was lending him perforce. That ripe, grey scholar listened grudgingly; more than once he begged for a lower whisper; and it was through him that the pair stayed behind in the hall when all the rest had trooped off to luncheon.

"It's a good many years ago," the old boy said. "She must have married and settled down since then, and had a hard time of it at that, I'm afraid; it's most awfully bad luck our crossing her path like this. She shall never know I spotted her. Women should always have another chance. And this one has been smashed up into the bargain; an accident, I gather; probably one of those infernal motors. I must look after her a bit more. Remember her? Do *you* remember her rocking turns and three-change-threes?"

¶

OLD Whiskers was as good as his word; at least he was as good to the poor lady as she would allow him to be. Now he remembered her better every time he saw her, and marvelled more and more at the change which a few short years had wrought in her. At sixty he himself looked to all intents and purposes as good a man as he had been at fifty-three; the salt had gained upon the pepper in his hair and moustache; his mirror advised him of no graver change. Yet here was a fine athletic girl transformed into a decrepit elderly lady in little more than a lustrum. Nemesis had handled her

very roughly; her present case was sufficient punishment for any past, even for that which seemed incredible when one looked upon the bright young smile under the beautiful silver hair. Old Whiskers was not sure but that it was an improvement, that hair!

It was about all he saw of Madame Faivre for a day or two; she held her nightly court in the lift when the young people were dancing in the hall, but the next time her elderly admirer approached she seized the lever herself and shot straight into the upper stories. He was waiting for the lift, however, if not for her, when she came floating down again with a book, and by means of an adroit compliment he got her to take him up again for his pipe. Nor did he immediately desert the lift in favour of younger blood on their return to the hall level.

"My waltzing days are over," said he, with a cunning sigh, as they looked out over the dancers; he loading his pipe particle by particle, with pauses in between.

"So are mine," said she, falling into the trap set for her sympathy.

He looked at her with a kindling eye.

"Ever waltz on the ice, madame?"

"Very badly, half-a-century ago!"

He laughed politely. "Ah! that's dancing," he said; "it makes all this sort of thing look silly."

The pipe got itself slowly, very slowly, loaded while he bragged about his own skating without asking any more questions about hers; until just as he was going, match in hand.

"Ever try a rocking turn?" he said.

"Never," she smiled confidently.

"Or a three-change-three?

"No."

"No more have I," he said, "for about a century by your reckoning, and I suppose I never shall again."

It was all very wanton, and at first he could not think why he had done it; but a little intellectual probing transfixed the reason in due time. It was not the romance which the knowing Man detected with such glee, and reported with strange epithets to his particular friends. Whiskers was not that kind of old fool; neither was he a crabbed bachelor with "no use for" the average woman. He could talk to her, on the contrary, with extreme cleverness and vivacity if she had any brains at all, with a hard sparkle in the worst of cases. He would even reason with the Suffragite. He liked talking to Madame Faivre; he would have loved madame to talk to him. He might have helped her. He heard himself sympathising, advising, bracing her with advice. There was no woman in his life who had any need of his advice or sympathy. He had broad ideas, a generous judgment of all but intellectual shortcomings; he would have been glad to show himself in those colours, for they were his true ones, though he had seldom had a chance of running them up on the high seas of life.

That was all; it was a fairly frequent thought, never an obsession. Whiskers was out to enjoy himself, and he did that daily and hourly on the rink. He had given up skating, as he said, but he had taken to curling, and he loved the game; it appealed to his intellect and humour; he would caper like a boy, would "soop up" like a good Galloway Scot. His daily foe was the Meenister; the Meenister cur-r-r-r-r-led. Watching them in twinkling skates and grubby sweater, the volatile figure of the small Wykehamist might be seen a mile off; it was worth skating that way to note his impudent little nose creased up in delight at dialogue and antics alike; luckily the little devil wasn't there on the dreadful day when the Meenister used a much worse word!

The one to spread that scandal was the Limit, a swarthy plutocrat blessed with the most olive of olive-branches, whom the Man nevertheless described as "a hectic crowd." The Limit wore rings on his fingers and diamonds in the rings. The Limit had the most extensive wardrobe in the hotel, and Mrs. Limit glittered all over like a jeweller's window at table-d'hôte. These statements seem due to a natural talent for nomenclature which was usually apposite and often inoffensive.

¶

THE whole party, despite a capacity for internecine strife latent in several of the tithe who have now been mentioned, got on admirably together until the second week in January, when the weather played them false. It had been ideal up to then: hard blue skies, hard black frosts, and no more snow. Everybody slid everywhere on a *luge*, or dragged it cheerfully up the hill; bob-sleighs were in favour, but the place had not risen to the perilous luxury of an

ice-run for true tobogganing. There was dancing every evening in all the hotels; there was even a combined fancy-dress ball, at which the Man—but enough of that valued contributor to the general gaiety. The thing was a success. The Lady of the Lift, who never left it all night, provided the only memorable instance of plain clothes; she made no change from the black crépon skirt which she wore day and night, with now one upper garment, now another; to-night it was merely the jet bodice of most nights, and yet Mrs. Limit in all her diamonds was often a lonely figure, but there was always a bevy about the lift.

That night the snow began. The next day it never stopped. The rink was covered, swept, covered deeper than ever, and finally deserted by disconsolate meenisters, scholars and skating tag-rag. Because the London papers had never been so keenly desired, the afternoon sledge never came up with them; luckily there was a telephone to allay anxiety; luckily, indeed, for every reason. It was already the one remaining line of communication with the outer world. The mountain road was practically obliterated by the snow. The very contour of the mountains seemed more generous, less angular. The snow fell straight and thick as rain from a windless sky, in tiny flakes. It stuck everywhere, followed the minutest shape of everything, bent the slenderest twig under a coating three times its own thickness. It turned the telephone wires into thick white ropes that you lost against the roof from which they sprouted, but followed for miles against the darkling pines. The Limits played bridge, the Man was sadly spoiling for Winchester, the admirable Whiskers set about organising an afternoon entertainment, and the Lady of the Lift told fortunes there for a local charity.

She was the life and soul of the place while things were at their worst, the witch who drew her children round her like the Pied Piper, only without piping, by just being herself and making play with a pack of cards and her own simple ready wit. Her hands, it was noted in this connection, were as smooth as her face; and the cruelty of the affliction that so aged her was more than ever emphasised by the splendid spirits which she not only maintained herself but infused into many of the most dejected sportsmen of both sexes.

But she grew paler under the strain; she had her very meals in the lift, despite draughts and cold; and after luncheon on the second day they found her there fast asleep.

"Why persevere in this extraordinary eccentricity?" asked old Whiskers, in quite a fatherly fashion. To sit in a chilly lift by the hour together! Where *can* the fun come in?"

"I do it not for fun," she said.

"Then why do you do it?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"You used to say it was to see what was going on."

"It was true."

"But nothing has been going on to-day, except your own most philanthropic side-show."

"I know."

"Then why conduct it here? Why not transfer your court to a warm room?"

She smiled faintly.

"Could you keep it to yourself if I told you?"

"I won't give you away, madame!" he exclaimed with some cordiality.

"It's because—by remaining in the lift—I—I have only *one* walk—to and from my room!"

He was horrified; she saw that he was, and signalled to the lift-boy.

"I will take your advice," she said, "and go to my room perhaps for the rest of the afternoon, if it has also finished to snow. Thank you very much for all your kindness." And up she went out of his ken, smiling down upon his blank upturned face.

It really had "finished to snow"—for the time being. That was why poor old Whiskers had come to have the Lady of the Lift to himself even for five minutes. The young people had all trooped out to see what could be done. It was just thawing. The Man shot a snowball with deadly aim at a young Limit, who ran off yelping to papa over his cigar and cognac in their private sitting-room. The missile had travelled like a cricket-ball till it went asunder on the nape of little Limit's neck, which it ran down like a waterfall.

The snow was declared to be "absolutely plumb" by the expert author of this dastardly attack; but the sky was black with more snow that might begin falling any minute. If an attack was to be made upon any or all of the other hotels, or a pitched battle fought with them in the

open (" an' what for no ? " cries the worthy Meenister), there's no time to be lost in manufacturing a *casus belli* (as Whiskers puts it), but a bloodthirsty challenge must be despatched at once. Budding Winchester takes it on his skis; he is not a Man any longer, but a boy of boys, his face flushed and his eyes shining for the fray. It comes on in incredibly few minutes. All are eager after it. A combat of the true Homeric type is soon raging in the snow; the aggressors become the defenders before they know where they are, or rather why they are back upon their hotel terrace. It is because the smaller hotels have converged upon them from three points of the compass. Hurrah! Three cheers for the Beau Site and Winchester! *A bas* Kurhaus —Belvedere—all the rotten lot!

Grand how the young boy hurls taunt and insult with his explosive cricket-balls; grander still to see " the old birds," " the old pets," " the stone-age gang," as he has called them behind their backs, shying, shouting, ducking, dodging with the best. Old Whiskers has not loosened some muscles so freely since cricket gave him up. The Suffragite is naturally to the front, and " Votes for Women! " becomes the bad boy's cry. He may say what he likes to anybody now. He has wiped out all his sins by bringing about this glorious battle, by his own heroic bearing in the van.

" Good shot, Daddy! "

" Look out, Mummy! "

That's the little dog both times; they will make something of him at Winchester yet. This is his show, remember! " I began it," he may boast all his days; for the least likely, the meekest, the quietest, the most stay-at-home-by-the-fire, all were in it before the end. O that Meenister! There were those who vowed they heard him railing to himself against " yon deevil," a prominent opponent, as he squeezed the snow from his beard. Even the unworthy Limit gathered great handfuls on his sitting-room balcony, where he and his were impregnably ensconced, and hurled them down like rocks upon the foe. . . .

And the whole thing has nothing whatever to do with the Lady of the Lift!

But the immediate sequel had.

In the first place they were asked not to make more noise than they could help, when they came in tramping and shouting, and some of the invaders with them, for a drink. Madame Faivre had taken to her bed. She only begged not to be disturbed. But the good *maître d'hôtel* would have taken upon himself to telephone down for a doctor; but there, what could you expect in such cold weather? The telephone had broken down. No; it was no use trying the other hotels; his was the main wire, of which they were mere extensions. The whole humming, glittering plateau was cut off from the world. As well cross the mountains on skis, and drop down into Innsbrück, as risk an avalanche on the precipitous pass down to the railway miles below; for the first exploit infinite knowledge and experience of the country would be requisite, for the second an infinity of good luck.

¶

THE entire crowd were in the fine big hall or lounge, their tanned and burnt faces glowing like lamps in the dusk, their voices hushed with one consent. It was sad to see the lift standing empty. None entered it, though many must have wished to sit down aloof, and more to be spirited upstairs. There was a consensus of vague feeling about it, and a well-known voice could be heard piping quite respectfully: " Poor old girl! She had her *agony duck* on all the morning! " Those who want to know what he meant had better apply to his *alma mater*.

Suddenly a bombshell burst on the assembly.

" Herr Breitstein! Herr Breitstein! " It was the Limit flying down the stairs. " We've been robbed, sir, robbed of everything in your confounded hotel, confound you! "

" 'Sh! 'sh! 'sh! " went Herr Breitstein, as sharply as the sound allowed. " There's a lady ill upstairs."

" Confound the lady! "

" Shame! Shame! " And a treble voice: " Didn't I tell you he was the Limit? "

" Well, she's probably been robbed as well," said the Limit, finding himself an unpopular figure on the stairs. " I advise everybody with valuables to go and see to them; we've lost all ours, and they were worth something, as you know."

This took three or four ladies upstairs apace, including the Winchester mamma.

A mechanic appeared with a little bag while they were gone, and began talking German to mine host.

" Herr Je ! " cries the good man excitedly. " Do you know what he tell me, shentlemen ? Our telephone wires have been cut, mit some sharbp imblement, on ziss side of ze inzulador outside ze top badroom vindow ! "

Imagine the twin wires, thickened into ropes of snow, vanishing and reappearing against snow and trees for miles and miles, looking like live rails back to the world, yet being dead all the time !

The three or four anxious ladies were back upon the stairs behind the Limit before useful comment had emerged from the general consternation. They also had each lost something—a watch—a bracelet—a garnet necklace—whatever of any value they had left behind them in their rooms.

" But my little lot are worth about fifteen 'undred quid," cried the Limit loudly.

Nobody bid against him ; but the good landlord again very properly checked the vociferous tone employed, repeating his reason on poor Madame Faivre's behalf. The name struck the lift-boy, struck a spark of memory that lit him up like a lamp. He struggled toward Herr Breitstein with roseate cheeks, and had his ears boxed for his pains the moment he ceased gabbling.

" Do you know what *he* tell me, ziss wretched poy ? He zee a voman come out of ze room of Madame Faivre—fine young voman—ze tief, shentlemen, ze tief if she haf not also murdered madame ! "

Up they rushed in a breathless bevy. There was no answer to their knocks, their hammering, their united shouts. The mechanic was called up to pick the lock ; mine host was not going to send good money after bad blood. But no blood had been shed ; no madame was there ; but her crutch was, and her crépon skirt, and the jet bodice among others. . . .

It was the Suffragite who put the whole case beyond doubt. She disappeared suddenly, was back in a minute, and broke in breathless :

" I know what else has gone—my skis—and she always told me they were the best in the hotel ! "

There was a shocked pause, hardly broken by a really carefully whispered : " Votes for Women ! " It was poor Whiskers who spoke the first word aloud.

" Good God ! " said he. " And I'd quite forgotten she was as good on skis as on skates ! "

They turned on him like one man.

" Did you know her before ? "

" Where did you know her ? "

" What do you know about her ? "

" I met her once at Davos years ago."

" Davos ! " cried mine host. " Zey had such a case zere in 'ninety-nine, shoost such a case, shentlemen ! "

" Oh, did they ? " says Whiskers without a blush ; and that was all he ever did say on the subject.

But the Man from Winchester is fairly entitled to the last word ; it took him some time to think it out, and his hearers come to see his point.

" On the whole," said he, " I wasn't so far wrong, was I, when I called her the lady of the *lift* ? "


# THE STORY-TELLER FOR *OCTOBER*

*On Sale SEPT. 15th.*

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# All Those Who Trust The Sea

*Of a man's strong faith in "the old indefatigable"*

By CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW

CAPTAIN TRANSOM walked wearily from the cab to the door of the dingy house. It is an unwritten law of the service that a master-mariner shall go home by four-wheeler when his ship reaches port, and though means were woefully straitened, Transom did not allow himself to depart from the precedent. To do so would have been to lower him in the eyes of his officers and crew.

"Just bring the baggage along, cabby," he said, and plied the knocker assiduously. The door was opened, opened tentatively, after the fashion of a door that is constructed exclusively to keep out too-pressing creditors. But when the woman behind it saw who knocked, a glad sigh of relief passed her lips. She darted on to the step, and threw her arms round the big man's sunburnt neck.

"Jack," she cried gladly, "Jack! I didn't expect you'd dock on this tide. Come in dear, come in," Transom stood off and paid the cabby, blushing a little at the man's unconcealed interest in the little tableau that had just been dissolved.

"Now, Minnie, shut the door." And he took his wife into an embrace that would have made a bear envious. But she, quick-witted, as women who wait and watch for month after never-ending month, noticed that the arms were not tenacious in their grip, that the man's head seemed to droop forward to her shoulder.

"What is it, dear? Let me look at you. Come into the parlour, where there's some light." And when that was done: "What have you been doing to yourself? You're worn out—a perfect skeleton! Tell me, dear; is anything wrong?"

"Nothing worse than usual, girl. It's that confounded death-trap of a steamer. Five days and five nights on the bridge, and never a chance for a wink of sleep. Had to stop up there. We managed to get through, but—we didn't manage much else."

"Was the weather very bad, then?"

"Awful. It wouldn't have mattered much in a decent ship, but in that slab-sided biscuit-tin, with her putty-and-paint get-up, it was as much as ever I could stand."

"Sit down, Jack. Yes, just there." She was a woman who knew how to put a cushion correctly for a tired man's head, and Transom sank into the seat with a general relaxation of every muscle that bespoke how worn out he was.

"Now, tell me about it, while I set the breakfast. No, don't attempt to get up; I can manage best myself. Can't you understand, you silly dear, that it's an honour to me to wait on you?"

"It isn't right that you should be doing this kind of thing, girl. It's a sin and a shame. If it hadn't been—but for that—confound it all, Minnie, it's more than I can bear!"

The man's iron will, tried beyond endurance under the strain and stress of the newly completed voyage, gave way for a moment. He shivered strongly, and his face grew pathetic; drooping mouth, half-shut eyes, and more than a suspicion of huskiness in his voice.

"It's heaven to me, dear, so that you are with me." She soothed him as some women can, and after a while he took a fresh hold on his courage, and shook off his despair. Then, as the fire-hot tea poured into his jaded frame, he sat up and told her what had happened on the voyage, telling it simply with sailor-like brevity, not seeking for effect: a plain statement of fact. Victoria Crosses have been won for far less than this man told there in that shabby parlour, eating a meagre breakfast.

"She's just a wreck not fit for the scrap-heap," he concluded. "If it hadn't been for Mackay, our chief, she'd never have won through. She was built in a hurry, and sent to sea in a hurry, and the curse of

the deep sea be on her, I say. Those Jew owners would skin a flint for its hide, and they'd try to strike a deal on the fat—d—— them!"

"Well, Jack, when the ship doesn't suit you, there's only one thing to be done—look for another. I'm sure you're wasted in a thing like the *Firebrand;* you who've been in liners. There must be dozens of ships wanting captains, and you're good enough for any of them. It's six months since you tried before, when—you know—when they said they wouldn't look at a man who'd—been unfortunate. They will have forgotten that now, and you ought not to be working for twelve pounds a month in a death-trap, when you're qualified for anything afloat."

"I'll see, lass, I'll see," he said dully, for the warmth and comfort were making him sleepy. "But first I must have a nap. Waken me in time for dinner, Minnie, and then I'll look out for a new berth."

But it was the same old story when he went forth into the shipping world and sought more lucrative employment. The fatal question, "Ever had any accident?" elicited the confession that a certain ship commanded by John Transom, master-mariner, had been driven ashore in a fog, and that the assessors had found the captain guilty of carelessness—not enough to cause his certificate to be dealt with, but still quite enough to call forth a sharp reprimand.

That was fatal. Though he walked the uninviting streets of the busy port until dark, he was bowed from office to office, and his quest brought him no vestige of hope.

He returned to his home sadly, bowed down by the weight of his cares, and told his luck, not despondingly, but with an assumed brightness that brought tears to a pair of keenly observant eyes.

"Try to-morrow, dear," his wife said briskly. "Now put your head here, and I'll tell you something."

He started up as she whispered into his ear, and his eyes were very kindly as they dwelt on the blushing face.

"Really, Minnie, really?"

"Yes, really."

"Thank God! I've longed for it for years. I will manage something now, now there'll be three to work for. You mark my words, lass, I'll force 'em to take me on."

The next day—there were but a few left now—he tried again, calling at the minor shipping offices, hoping against hope that something would come out of the blackness of despondency and give him a gleam of brightness. But it was the same story: No vacancies for a man who had lost his ship, and after a few more days in port the recollection of the past voyage receded into the dim recesses of memory, and Transom resigned himself to the inevitable.

"But the sea's played out," he said with a portentous shake of the head, the night before he sailed. "There's nothing to be gained at it. It takes a man's blood and bones, and gives him nothing but a dry crust in return. If the—if it's a boy, Minnie, I'll cut his throat sooner than let him tread a deck."

"The sea'll be our friend yet, Jack, don't you fear. God won't let the child starve. I've faith in my husband, and I've faith in the grim old sea. We'll see who's right."

Next morning the *Firebrand* slipped gruntingly out of dock, and turned her face towards the open sea, complaining in every plate and stringer at the shortness of the rest that had been accorded her.

¶

THE grey old sea put on its best face to welcome the rusty, toil-worn tramp, and as day followed calm, smooth day, Transom felt his spirits rising higher and higher. It needs dry weather and untroubled water, steady decks and a rising barometer, to bring peace to the sailorman's soul, and these were all given to Captain Transom now. He remembered what his wife had told him about their coming happiness, and the days were all too short for him to ruminate upon his well-being.

"Ay, she's no daein' sae bad," said the dour old chief engineer. "She's a hopeless cripple o' a shippie, sic a ship as a north-country yard wad be ashamed tae turn oot, but considerin' she's naught but a biscuit-box wi' shairpened ends, she's managin', she's managin' fine."

"Everything working right below, Mr. Mackay? No cylinders blowing out, nothing of that kind, eh?"

"Oh, ay, she's daein' weel ablow. It's no' her engines 'at A'm skeart o', for Dunlop built them, an' the Clyde's engines are second tae nane. But gin ye put a giant intae a paper bag, ye'll ken ane o' twa things'll happen. Either he'll no' be feelin' like usin' his strength, or—the bag

'ill burst wi' a maist michty smash. Dae ye ken ma simile ? "

" Yes, I understand all right. But it's no use meeting our troubles half way, Mac, and we ought to be thankful for even this spell of fine weather. The bay's looking fine and quiet now, and it might keep up for goodness knows how long."

" Did ever ye ken Biscay tae behave twice in succession alike ? " asked the pessimist. " For ane fine crossing ye'll get a dozen o' the ither kind. But—she's a sair sicht for a mon that tak' a bit pride in the ships he drives. Gude sakes ! but she's a basket—ay, an' a michty sorry basket at that. Aaron an' Bochstein maun mak' a pretty penny o' the *Firebrand*, for she costs them naething for her upkeep."

But the pessimistic chief engineer seemed to be mistaken this voyage, for the fine weather held with wonderful persistence. The *Firebrand* wallowed her slobbering, unhandy way down past Cape St. Vincent, surged to the rush of the tide through the Straits, passed Gibraltar lying like a sleeping lion in the roseate morning haze, and trudged stubbornly through the still waters of the Mediterranean. She dumped her cargo of coal and steel rails, that tear the very life out of a ship, ashore at Alexandria, and then became an outcast on the face of the waters, sent here and there at the whim and fancy of innumerable agents, who hoped to get rid of the ill-omened craft without much trouble and expense. She lay at anchor for a week at Smyrna, but no cargo came, and she wallowed back to Alexandria, only to be dismissed hurriedly on account of an outbreak of plague. She sauntered into the harbour of Syra, which is the Grecian Liverpool, and a keen-eyed port doctor boarded her in haste to learn her last port departure. On learning it, he peremptorily commanded the *Firebrand* into quarantine, and for the whole of a miserable fortnight the tramp lay in a land-locked bay, desolate as the desert of Sahara, with nothing to relieve the awful monotony of the weary days.

Finally, with the patience of all on board worn out, the ship was sent to a place where a sheer rock grew up out of the sea, and in the face of the stupendous precipice was a chute, tilted up at an unconcerned angle. After much loss of temper and with an abundance of fiery words, they moored the *Firebrand* under the cliff, and for a week a steady stream of iron ore descended into her holds down the chute, which had no longer its expression of contempt, but seemed to point downwards with a menacing finger. Downwards—to the bottom of the sea.

Loaded to the scuppers, with her hull full of a cargo that was as unkindly as the hearts of the owners, a cargo that would drag at her very life and spring her very stanchions, the *Firebrand* put her nose into a curling swell, and wallowed shamefacedly homewards.

And as she lurched along, throwing herself about like an acrobat in delirium when a squall smote her from the Gulf of Lyons, Transom prayed hard for fine weather and open seas. He had that in his pocket that told him his hopes were near fruition, for Minnie had written a long letter, a letter full of cheerful courage and high expectation, saying nothing of the fear that would oppress her when she thought of the coming time. She was a true sailor's wife, and she knew well that her husband had enough to bear without listening to a recital of her own fears and anxieties.

" The glass is falling," said Transom to Mackay as they sat down to the miserable meal designated supper by the owners. Gibraltar had been passed in safety, but the first heave of the wide Atlantic had shown them what the *Firebrand's* behaviour might be, supposing any evil fortune came their way.

" Ay, an' it'll fa' mair an' mair," growled the chief engineer. " Gin I ken aught aboot weather we're in for a sneezer. Weel, blazes is blazes, an' we canna complain. Ye get yer twal' pounds a month, an' I get eleeven—losh sakes, but we airn it ! "

They got all they expected and more. That night the sea was hidden in mist and murk, and a spatter of rain fell, the herald of the coming storm. Before morning the tramp was lurching and wallowing piggishly in a wintry waste of heaving water that seemed the last word in hopelessness. But as yet the worst was not come, for the gale was from the south-west, and the sea was a following one. It would be different presently, for the wind would assuredly shift ahead to the north-west, and then—Transom set his teeth grimly. There might be no " then " for all on board if the gale was what it threatened to be.

Throughout that day they made preparations for what was prophesied by the rapidly falling barometer. Scamped for economy's sake, with plates the thickness of paper, rusted thinner still by reason of the parsimony that forbade a judicious expenditure of saving paint; the work of a scoundrelly builder, who was pared down to further scoundrelism by reason of the acute minds that had engaged him, ill-found, ill-manned, with doubtful plates passed through the hands of the shipwrights for want of proper supervision, with chiselled rivets and ill-wrought bends, the *Firebrand* made ready for the struggle that was to come, and every inch of her sang a weird complaint to the misery she must endure.

"It's stopped falling," said the mate despondently, after consulting the barometer in the hut that passed for a chart-house. "It'll jump up in a bit."

Transom went himself to consult the glass. It was ominous. The mercury had sunk to a little above twenty-eight, and there was a sinister convexity on its surface that told more than any lowness could tell. There was going to be a gale that would try the mettle of the stoutest, and heaven help those whom it caught napping!

Out on deck again to survey the presage of coming evil. The day had closed down in blackness and wrath; the world seemed to be shutting out the happenings that must transpire from all human sight. Only the sodden thump and hiss of the falling seas broke the momentary calm that had come suddenly. The clang of the fallen shovel rang loudly in that unnatural stillness, the curse of a scalded trimmer sounded grimly clear and grotesque. Darker and darker grew the shrouded day. The seas ran confusedly now, one minute from the south, another from the north meeting in mid career and throwing up a seething broth of angry foam.

In the midst of this waste the *Firebrand* lay, slogging along desperately, with the gait of a wounded dog, striving to escape from the wrath to come. But she was handicapped from the first. A steely glare broke out in the north-west; it showed luridly in the dark curtain.

"Stand by," roared Transom to the men who were working on the fore-deck. "It's coming!" The men turned and scuttled for safety into alleyways and forecastle, staggering drunkenly as the ship lifted her side and rolled. She rolled over and over, until her ugly red bilge showed above the grey-green of the sea. Over and over, and then, as she lay there wallowing, the storm drove down. It was like something solid as it came. It struck the *Firebrand* and flattened her like a haystack. Something broke away in the stokehold, and rattled to leeward with the sound of breaking glass; there was a sluttering rush of coal, great clouds of steam rose through the stokehold gratings. And still the *Firebrand* lay over to that dreadful blast, inert and helpless, shuddering throughout her length to the beat of the engines, incapable, weighed down, useless.

Transom clawed his way down the rails, slipping at every step, until he was abreast the wheel. Then he made a short, staggering run, and clutched the spokes.

"Down with it!" he screamed, and together he and the man at the helm hove down the old-fashioned hand-wheel. They dragged at the spokes above their heads desperately, clawing and sweating, treading on every spoke they gained, lest it should be torn from their hands as they freshened their grip. The mate came to their assistance, and little by little the helm was shifted. The *Firebrand* felt the weight of the rudder, and commenced, all listed as she was, to creep up into the eye of the wind. It was none too soon, for a solid mass of water weighing hundreds of tons had poured in over the lee bulwarks, and filled the decks to the rails.

It was a slow job, but, aided by helm and engines, she weathered the first knock-down blow, and brought the gale ahead. Transom's fear that the cargo might have shifted vanished as she climbed staggeringly upright. It had simply been the awful pressure of air that had kept her down.

And now the gale raged furiously. The *Firebrand* put her ugly nose under the succession of racing seas, and a constant cascade of water poured from her flooded forecastle head. Under ordinary circumstances she might have lifted to the 'scend of the seas, but now she was like a lifeless thing, and they had their own way with her, and used it mercilessly.

For hour after hour the turmoil on deck went on. Transom's senses grew dull and sodden through the constant uproar—the crashing seas, the howling wind, the

chattering funnel guys, the clanging washports. Men relieved each other laboriously at the wheel, the second mate climbed to the bridge, and received his instructions from the mate with a shiver of disgust. He was a youngster, this second mate, not long out his time: a burly, Herculean giant of a man, who had been brought up in hard-case sailing ships through the ignorance of his parents. While there he had learned to recognise and appreciate men, and he nodded to himself as his eyes pierced the blackness and made out the silent, motionless figure of the captain, standing to windward with every fibre braced for the fray.

"Good man," said the youngster. "There's a chance yet."

As he said the words, a mighty wave swept the ship, and the ensuing crashing told its own tale.

"That's one of the lifeboats, isn't it?" asked the captain. There was no need for answer, for a second later another crash told that the after-boat, the cutter, had followed the lifeboat.

There was nothing to be done. A still more furious wave than ever smote a yawning breach in the fore bulwarks, and the clanging of rolling iron was added to the raging din.

Transom's thoughts were busy now. He reckoned up all that had gone, and tried to consider all that was still to come. The ship had been delayed unconscionably, what with the hunt for cargo and the ensuing quarantine. Every day meant money lost for the owners, and he knew that Aaron and Bochstein would not look upon such wastage with a kindly eye. Added to this were the shattered bulwarks, the lost boats—a formidable total. Looking ahead he saw nothing but ruin for himself, even supposing he escaped with his bare life. The owners would look at the ship, and not at the manner of her handling. They would not read between the lines in the bald statement in the log-book. It meant dismissal, and—then he remembered the old hunt for work, and his soul grew chill within him.

Morning came, and brought them no rest. If anything, the day was worse than the night, for the darkness hid the worst of their troubles from them, while dawn, showed them up in all their revolting ugliness. It was drawing on towards night when a majestic liner appeared out of the swirling spindrift and darkness astern, and trod the foaming seas proudly in the *Firebrand's* wake. She walked along in proud indifference to the raging storm, her vast grey side impervious to the serried attacks of the hungry waves. She shot up into the foaming wake left by the labouring tramp, and threw out a signal. Transom himself bent on the answer, with his lips clenched and his eyes burning.

Those on the liner stared as the dauntless message was flashed across the waste: "All's well."

"That'll show him we're still on deck," said Transom grimly. "She's a Palace liner, and they'll be going down to a seven-course dinner presently in a white-enamelled saloon. There are more ways than one of going to sea."

¶

THE storm had lulled a little during the day, enabling them to repair roughly the worst of the damage. But when night came down again it found them spent and weary, with the salt dried on their cracking lips, with bloodshot eyes and trembling hands.

Incredible as it may seem, the ship made headway. She was engined far beyond her class, but her niggardly owners forbade the free use of coal. Mackay, saying that they were fighting for life, plied his furnaces unceasingly, eager to get the ship driven through the storm-zone, and the worst thrown behind.

Another dawn broke chillingly, and the storm was gathering up all its powers to overwhelm the unfortunate *Firebrand*. Where before the wind had screamed, it now howled, yelled, roared, and spat in a breath. It was a magnificent example of elemental warfare, for the fields of the upper air had the matter given into their own hands, and were fighting it out between them. Woe betide anything that should interfere with that gigantic combat! And it seemed as if the *Firebrand* were in the way, for she was the butt and sport of every ounce of the gale.

But she kept afloat, though Transom could not understand why she did not fill and go down into the underseas. The bitter struggle was all to undergo over again, but though she trembled a thousand times on the verge of disaster, she worried along somehow, and full day still found her struggling.

They had had no food of moment for

two days now. The galley was a wave-swept wreck, the store-rooms in the cabins were awash. A little coffee, strongly impregnated with salt, was heated on the stokehold furnaces, and that, diluted with copious libations of brandy, kept the weary life in them.

It was about ten o'clock when a something loomed up uncertainly out of the sea-fog ahead, only to disappear again as the *Firebrand* dashed down a great watery valley. But as she soared again, the object grew more distinct, and Transom, unbelieving, snatched the glasses from the box and gazed long and earnestly towards the new spot on the restless sea. Suddenly he slammed the glasses back into the box, and the second mate, shivering and miserable, yet high-spirited still, heard him say: "The Palace Boat! What's wrong?"

Another hour of that strenuous struggle brought them within clearer view of the ship ahead. There was no mistaking her now: the grey sides, the red, black-topped funnel, told plainly what she was.

"She must be damaged," said Transom, and the second mate nodded.

"Big salvage for some man if she is," he yelled. On that the idea was born in Transom's brain, wearied though it was from the incessant strain of watching.

"If she's broken down," he said, "if she's helpless—we'll try our luck." And the second mate stared at him as if he had gone mad.

Hardly had the captain spoken than two round shapes soared up the foremast of the great liner. They stood for a signal of defeat; where the ill-found, scrap-heap tramp had worried through with safety, the gigantic leviathan had bowed her head in shame and disgrace.

"In distress," commented Transom in the voice of a bull, and there was something suggestive of laughter in his tones. "In distress, by heaven!"

He gave an order, and presently those on the liner saw a stream of flags rise to the *Firebrand's* span. Transom was asking if he could render assistance! He, who was almost on the brink of death, was urging them to accept his help!

There was a heated confabulation on the Palace liner now. The captain derided the possibility of receiving tangible help from the tiny *Firebrand*, the mate and the chief engineer mentioned the fact that dangerous rocks were close under the lee, that a north-west gale was blowing heaven's hardest, and that it was merely a question of hours before the end came.

"And there's no chance of a boat living in this sea—not filled with passengers, anyhow," concluded the chief mate.

"But that thing couldn't do anything," demurred the captain of the *Lambeth Palace*. "She's got more than she can handle already."

"There's a man who knows his work aboard or he wouldn't be asking if you needed help," said the chief engineer. The debate waxed hot, but it was soon over. A dull booming note seemed to underlie the voice of the gale, and men said it was the surf on the Portuguese coast they heard. The *Lambeth Palace* had dropped her propeller into the sea's bed as she lifted to the sweep of a wave, and she was far more helpless than a log. In her cabins were some three hundred souls, in her mail-room and specie-room cargo of fabulous value.

"Signal that ship to close in," said the captain. "It might put off the end for an hour or so."

¶

THE men of the *Firebrand* refused flatly to have anything to do with the job. They said, with accompanying oaths, that they had fought for their lives, and that in fighting they had worn themselves out. If those on the liner wanted to live, let them fight also.

But Transom had made up his mind. He foresaw vast possibilities of salvage; he was actuated as much by the mercenary chances of the work as by the humane opportunities. Looking forward, he could see a vista of comparative wealth. He had heard of captains salving liners and coming through five hundred pounds to the good. And the *Lambeth Palace* had the mails, as like as not a great cargo of specie as well. His wife would be cared for, she would not need to harass her soul with thinking on his misfortunes, and—there was also the little one, as yet unborn. The *Firebrand* had lived through the worst part of the worst gale on record; it would not be his fault if she did not weather the rest, even with the ten-thousand-ton monster swinging at her tail.

He called his senior officers to a conference. The mate was pessimistic and

unbelieving, the chief engineer expressed his opinion in no measured terms.

"She's got the engines tae howk her through—ay, an' yon wallopin' factory beside. A' michtna' hae tell't ye, but Dunlop engined this craft. Well, as far's pooer's concerned, ye're a' richt. Can ye say the same for the ship hersel'?"

"She'll do it or break her back," said Transom desperately, and so the decision was made.

They could never tell how they got the tow-rope made fast. Seymour, the young second mate, begged, commanded, threatened, and kicked until he had secured five volunteers to man the boat, which he proposed to take himself across the few fathoms of surging horror that lay between the two ships. They lugged up the *Firebrand's* stoutest tow-rope, and doubled it; they dragged up coil after coil of medium rope, and added it to the rest. Finally, after the lapse of an hour, Transom expressed his opinion that the work was good. They coiled away half the tow-rope in the only remaining lifeboat, and lowered away.

They got the men aboard just in time. As the boat's keel took the water, a sinister monster of a wave surged up the ship's side, and lifted the trivial craft bodily against the plates. Though the men fended off desperately it was useless; a second later only a few fragments of match-wood remained, with the dripping men scrambling like rats up the ropes flung down to their aid.

"There's no more chance," grunted the mate, and he grinned behind his collar. Transom said nothing then—he was thinking hard, reckoning up chances, weighing them against that possible five hundred pounds.

"Get steam on the winches, and heave that tow-rope aboard," he said sharply, "or you'll have it fouling the propeller." And while the mate went to attend to the work, Transom called the second mate to him, explaining what he purposed.

"You'll stand aft with a heaving line," he said, "and when we slew in you'll heave." Than he took the helm himself, bidding the wondering helmsman stand by; the second mate departed aft, calling the crew to follow, and the great work began.

The people of the *Lambeth Palace* had seen the accident to the boat, and had given up hope of being rescued by the *Firebrand*. But hardly had the last fragment of splintered wood drifted out of sight than they saw the *Firebrand* tuck up her heels and lurch giddily away on the crest of a wave.

"Deserting us," commented the captain of the liner, and then: "No, by Jove! There's either a madman or a hero on that steamer's bridge."

It was a task that required every nicety of hand and eye to navigate the rolling, squelching, unhandy *Firebrand* within the hail of the mail-boat. But she came along somehow, steering straight for the beam. Then, just as the men gripped the rails and swore piously, the tramp lurched round on her heel, dipped heavily, washed away two ventilators and a few feet of her bulwark plating, and slung her stern close under the rail of the *Lambeth Palace*. Half-a-dozen men caught the flying heaving-line and dragged it aboard. They led the stouter line to the winch, and with that dragged the curious tow rope into its place. Then the signal was given to go ahead.

"She'll tow those bitts out as if they were carrots," said the mate.

"I'm not going to use those bitts," said Transom. "Take the tow-rope clean round the poop-structure. Parcel every corner, and bring the bight of the line round the main-mast. We'll tow the whole stern off before we give in." And when all was in order they steamed slowly ahead.

For the first two hours the two ships drifted helplessly to leeward before the thrust of the gale, but, though the booming of the not far distant surf grew menacing in the extreme, Transom still persevered, beseeching Mackay to give them of the best. The drag on the *Firebrand's* stern was tremendous, but she did not break in two, and after a long while of awful suspense the wake stretched astern instead of to the broadside. The tow-rope grew taut for the first time, and the liner slugged along heavily in the tramp's wake. Transom rubbed his hands, and said he had already won.

But no man shall tell of the rest of that superhuman struggle. There were hours that seemed to spell the tramp's destruction with each slow minute that passed. The constant drag on her stern hampered her awfully; a beast before, she now became a legion of beasts. Sleep was forgotten, food was almost unknown in the long days that passed the securing of the tow. They ran into a zone of fine weather off Finisterre, and took advantage of it to effect some

much needed repairs in the towing gear, and then, a Biscay gale welcomed them with boisterous effrontery, and they lost almost all they had gained.

But after tortures unending, the shadow of Eddystone fell across them, and they toiled miserably into safe haven.

¶

THEY dry-docked the *Firebrand*, and sadly she needed it. Her stern was drooping, rivets were started in a hundred places, the plates were bent and twisted grotesquely. They patched her up with putty and paint, keeping down repairs to the lowest minimum, and when this was done they loaded her full of coal and rails again, and sent her journeying overseas. Aaron pulled a long face when he saw the extent of the damage done, and made his complaint in no uncertain voice.

" She's ruined as a ship," he said dolefully. " Lloyd's will never pass her again."

Transom thought of his possible five hundred pounds, and regarded the question philosophically. They had retained the second mate to give evidence at the coming salvage case, because his was the smallest salary of any officer aboard, and the expenses would be lessened. But Seymour had learnt many things during that struggle with death, and when the time came to speak he spoke shrewdly, with a certain dramatic picturesqueness that won the hearers' attention. But that was later, and for three long months the *Firebrand* bucketed to and fro, labouring heavily, playing the old, weary game, until the hearts grew sick and eyes grew strained, and tempers grew uncertain to the last degree.

The pilot brought a batch of newspapers with him as he came aboard at the bar. Transom carried them down to his poor apology for a cabin, and opened them nervously. Mackay came along to share the news.

" Here it is, by Jove " cried the captain. " We're got through, Mac. Five hundred pounds salvage, and dirt cheap at that. But listen to this ' In view of the splendid heroism of the captain, the judge decrees that the salvage money shall be appointed as follows Three thousand pounds to the owners, one thousand pounds to the captain, four hundred to the chief engineer, and the rest of the crew *pro rata*.' Mac, my fortune's made. A thousand pounds ! A thousand pounds ! I don't think I'll ever go to sea again. If I could only hear that the wife——"

But that was too sacred even for the engineer's sympathetic hearing. A thousand pounds—and the child !

" It's by-ordinar'," said Mackay. " Judges dinna gi'e ower much credit tae them 'at dae the worrkin these jobs. Forbye I wisna ower joyfu' at that thocht o' undertakin' yon bit o' salvage. But I did hear a rumour tae the effect 'at the Admiralty judge wis aboard yon *Lambeth Palace* shippie, an' that he saw whit ye did. Mayhap he had a heart in his bosom."

That was veritably the case. His Honour Judge Sleeman had been a witness to the excellent work done by the *Firebrand*, and he had also judged cases before in which Aaron and Co. had figured. Therefore he made the award as the papers declared.

" Good old sea ! " said Transom, as he came back to the bridge. " She treats us well after all."

There was nothing wrong with the sea, though it is universally declaimed by those who use it. But as yet Transom had not reckoned with the harder men who obtained a very good living from the ocean. It was Aaron who dashed his exuberant hopes to the ground almost before he had realised the good thing that was his.

Letters came off to the *Firebrand* before she reached her dock, and one in his wife's handwriting brought a strange tightness to Transom's throat, a mistiness to his eyes. He opened it with trembling fingers, and then sank down on his settee with a sigh of relief. All was well with the mother and the child. The boy was like his father, and the letter overflowed with quiet, satisfied happiness.

" We'd like your attention to what we're going to say Captain," said Aaron coldly, when he had Transom to himself in his office.

" A thousand pounds The child's like his father," sang Transom's heart gaily.

" I'm listening, sir," he said aloud.

' Well, listen carefully. You had no business to undertake such a tow as the *Lambeth Palace*. You knew at the time that the *Firebrand* was not strong enough for the work. You've ruined her for ever. Why didn't you let the liner go hang ? Some other ship would have picked her up, likely enough."

"You don't realise, sir," said the captain slowly, trying to fight down that glad, exultant echo in his heart. "She was going ashore fast, and there wasn't another ship in sight. It was sheer common humanity."

"It was deliberate extravagance. We don't expect our captains to go about the high seas looking for salvage cases. I believe you went on purpose, for the sake of getting the money. And the award is most unfair. We—the greatest sufferers—pocket a measly three thousand pounds, while you, who merely looked on and risked nothing, get one thousand."

"I risked a good deal, sir. I risked my life and the life of every man aboard. And—no man will ever be able to tell what the strain was."

"Well, we've an ultimatum to offer you. Here's the bill for repairs to the *Firebrand*. You see the total—fifteen hundred pounds? Unless you pay one thousand of that total you lose your job at once. And, mind you, we shall take care to shut you out from another command if you refuse. A thousand pounds won't last for ever, Captain Transom, so your best plan is to pay over the money, and then we will retain you in our service at a salary of thirteen pounds a month."

"But—I refuse unconditionally," gasped Transom. "It's sheer robbery."

"It's nothing of the sort. You did the damage to the ship; on you should fall the expense of repairing that damage. Take it or leave it—either you pay or—go."

"Give me till to-morrow to think it over," said the suddenly unhappy man, and the privilege was granted.

He went out of the office like a man in a dream. He was staggered, overcome; the sheer rapacity of the thing appalled him. And yet he knew Aaron's threat was not an empty one. Once let a shipowner decide to blast the career of one of his shipmasters, and it were better for that sailor that a millstone were hanged about his neck.

"I expect I'll have to pay up and keep my job," said Transom soberly, as he let himself into his house and heard a little sound that sent all outside thoughts flying away. He was upstairs in a thrice, and in another he held his wife and his son in his arms.

But it so happened that the *Lambeth Palace* carried another distinguished passenger in addition to the Judge of the Admiralty Court—which accounted for the presence of the business-like letter on the mantel-piece below, when Transom came downstairs. He opened it without any great hope in his heart. The sight of his wife's face, wan and pale, had told him that he must accept Aaron's dictum. She was in a need of constant attendance and care.

He read the opening lines, and started convulsively. Then he read on, with a mad song in his soul:

> Dear Sir,—I had the extreme good fortune to be aboard the *Lambeth Palace* at the time your ship salved her. Your conduct on that occasion elicited my warmest admiration, and I realised that you were the sort of man we need in our company. If you care to accept an interim appointment as chief officer for three months until our ship the *Minotaur* is ready for sea, we shall be pleased to take you into our employment, to be promoted to the command of the new boat, at a salary of five hundred pounds per annum, on her first voyage.

The letter was signed by the senior partner of the greatest shipping line in London.

And the sea had been worthy of the trust reposed in her, for the solution was at hand.

# THE ARGOSY VOTING COMPETITION

WE again offer two prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the readers who send in the titles of the four best stories in the order of merit which most nearly coincides with the votes of the majority. Stories must be selected from this issue. The Editor's decision will be final.

Entries should be made on postcards addressed to: "Vote," THE ARGOSY, Gough House, Gough Square, London. E.C.4 (Comp.), and sent in by September 30, 1927. The result will be announced in THE ARGOSY for DECEMBER, on sale November 4, 1927.

We have pleasure in awarding a prize of Two Guineas to: MRS. STEVEN, 103, Iffley Road, Oxford, and a prize of One Guinea to: MISS A. ROSS, Slade Mount, Slade Lane, Manchester, as the result of the competition for August.

# The Knight Whose Armour Didn't Squeak

*A new and delightful Poem*

By A. A. MILNE

OF all the Knights in Appledore
The wisest was Sir Thomas Tom.
He multiplied as far as four,
And knew what nine was taken from
To make eleven. He could write
A letter to another Knight.

No other Knight in all the land
Could do the things which he could do.
Not only did he understand
The way to polish swords, but knew
What remedy a Knight should seek
Whose armour had begun to squeak.

And, if he didn't fight too much,
It wasn't that he did not care
For blips and buffetings and such,
But felt that it was hardly fair
To risk, by frequent injuries,
A brain as delicate as his.

His castle (Castle Tom) was set
Conveniently on a hill ;
And daily, when it wasn't wet,
He paced the battlements until
Some smaller Knight who couldn't swim
Should reach the moat and challenge him.

Or sometimes, feeling full of fight,
He hurried out to scour the plain ;
And, seeing some approaching Knight,
He either hurried home again,
Or hid ; and, when the foe was past,
Blew a triumphant trumpet-blast.

One day when good Sir Thomas Tom
Was resting in a handy ditch,
The noises he was hiding from,
Though very much the noises which
He'd always hidden from before,
Seemed somehow less . . . Or was it more ?

The trotting horse, the trumpet's blast,
  The whistling sword, the armour's squeak,
These, and especially the last,
  Had clattered by him all the week.
Was this the same, or was it not?
*Something was different.* But what?

Sir Thomas raised a cautious ear
  And listened as Sir Hugh went by,
And suddenly he seemed to hear
  (or not to hear) the reason why
This stranger made a nicer sound
Than other Knights who lived around.

Sir Thomas watched the way he went—
  His rage was such he couldn't speak.
For years they'd called him down in Kent
  The Knight Whose Armour Didn't Squeak!
Yet here and now he looked upon
*Another* Knight whose squeak had gone!

He rushed to where his horse was tied;
  He spurred it to a rapid trot.
The only fear he felt inside
  About his enemy was not
"How sharp his sword?" "How stout his heart?"
But "Has he got too long a start?"

Sir Hugh was singing, hand on hip,
  When something sudden came along,
And caught him a terrific blip
  Right in the middle of his song.
"A thunderstorm!" he thought. "Of course!"
And toppled gently off his horse.

Then said the good Sir Thomas Tom,
  Dismounting with a friendly air,
"Allow me to extract you from
  The heavy armour that you wear.
At times like these the bravest Knight
May find his armour much too tight."

A hundred yards or so beyond
  The scene of brave Sir Hugh's defeat
Sir Thomas found a useful pond,
  And, careful not to wet his feet,
He brought the armour to the brink,
And flung it in . . . and watched it sink.

## The Knight Whose Armour Didn't Squeak

So ever after, more and more,
The men of Kent would proudly speak
Of Thomas Tom of Appledore,
"The Knight Whose Armour Didn't Squeak."
Whilst Hugh, the Knight who gave him best,
Squeaks just as badly as the rest.

## *Dr. Johnson uses the butt-end*

THERE was a pretty large circle this evening. Dr. Johnson was in a very good humour, lively, and ready to talk on all subjects. Mr. Fergusson, the self-taught philosopher, told him of a new invented machine which went without horses; a man who sat in it turned a handle, which worked a spring, that drove it forward. "Then, sir," said Johnson, "what is gained is, the man has his choice whether he will move himself alone, or himself and the machine, too." Dominicetti being mentioned, he would not allow him any merit. "There is nothing in all this boasted system. No, sir; medicated baths can be no better than warm water; their only effect can be that of tepid moisture." One of the company took the other side, maintaining that medicines of various sorts, and some, too, of most powerful effect, are introduced into the human frame by the medium of the pores; and, therefore, when warm water is impregnated with salutiferous substances, it may produce great effects as a bath. This appeared to me very satisfactory. Johnson did not answer it; but talking for victory, and determined to be master of the field, he had recourse to the device which Goldsmith imputed to him in the witty words of one of Cibber's comedies: "There is no arguing with Johnson; for when one pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it." He turned to the gentleman: "Well, sir, go to Dominicetti, and get thyself fumigated; but be sure that the steam be directed to thy *head*, for *that* is the *peccant part*." This produced a triumphant roar of laughter from the motley assembly of philosophers, printers, and dependants, male and female.

JAMES BOSWELL.

## *A Natural Philosopher*

I REMEMBER once, by Horncastle, near to Stikeswold, in Lincolnshire, in the heat of summer, I met with a swineherd keeping his hogs on a fallow field.

"My friend," quoth I, "you keep here a company of unruly cattle!"

"Ay, poor souls, they are indeed," quoth he.

"I believe," said I, "they have a language among themselves, and can understand one another."

"Ay, as well as you or I."

"Were they ever taught?"

"Alas, poor things, they know not one letter of the book! I teach them all they have."

"Why, what saith that great hog with red spots," quoth I, "that lies under another, in his grunting language."

"Marry, he bids him that sleeps so heavy upon him, to lie farther off."

HENRY PEACHAM.

# A Conquest of Humility

## By MARY E. WILKINS

**Mary E. Wilkins stands alone as a delineator of unsophisticated emotions. This story will appeal by its tense, dramatic atmosphere and by the steady undercurrent of humanity flowing throughout. Mary E. Wilkins approaches her theme from an angle which is at once new and in striking contrast to her American contemporaries.**

TWO O'CLOCK had been the hour set for the wedding. It was now four, and the bridegroom had not yet appeared. The relatives who had been bidden to the festivities had been waiting impatiently in the two square front rooms of Maria Caldwell's house, but now some had straggled out into the front yard, from which they could look up the road to better advantage.

They were talking excitedly. A shrill feminine babble, with an undertone of masculine bass, floated about the house and yard. It had been swelling in volume from a mere whisper for the last half hour—ever since Hiram Caldwell had set out for the bridegroom's house to ascertain the reason for his tardiness at his own wedding.

Hiram, who was a young fellow, had gotten into his shiny buggy with a red, important face, and driven off at a furious rate. He was own cousin to Delia Caldwell, the prospective bride. All the people assembled were Thayers or Caldwells, or connections thereof. The tardy bridegroom's name was Lawrence Thayer.

It was a beautiful summer afternoon. The air was hot and sweet. Around the Caldwell house it was spicy sweet with pinks; there was a great bed of them at the foot of the green bank which extended under the front windows.

Some of the women and young girls pulled pinks and sniffed them as they stood waiting. Mrs. Erastus Thayer had stuck two or three in the bosom of her cinnamon-brown silk dress. She stood beside the gate; occasionally she craned her neck over it and peered down the road. The sun was hot upon her silken shoulders; the horizontal wrinkles shone, but she did not mind.

"See anything of him?" someone called out.

"No. I'm dreadful afraid somethin' has happened."

"Oh, mother, what do you think's happened?" asked a young girl at her side, hitting her with a sharp elbow. The girl was young, slim, and tall; she stooped a little; her pointed elbows showed redly through her loose white muslin sleeves; her face was pretty.

"Hush, child! I don't know," said her mother.

The girl stood staring at her with helpless, awed eyes.

At last the woman in cinnamon-brown silk turned excitedly about. "He's comin'!" she proclaimed, in a shrill whisper.

The whisper passed from one to another. "He's coming!" everybody repeated. Heads crowded together at the window; all the company was in motion.

"It ain't Lawrence," said a woman's voice, disappointedly. "It ain't nobody but his father, with Hiram."

"Somethin' *has happened*," repeated Mrs. Thayer. The young girl trembled and caught hold of her mother's dress; her eyes grew big and wild. Hiram Caldwell drove up the road. He met the gaze of the people with a look of solemn embarrassment. But he was not so important as he had been. There was a large, white-headed old man with him, who drew the larger share of attention. He got lumberingly out of the buggy when Hiram drew rein at the gate. Then he proceeded up the gravel walk to the house. The people stood back and stared. No one dared speak to him except Mrs. Erastus Thayer. She darted before him in the path; her brown silk skirts swished.

"Mr. Thayer," cried she, "what is the matter? Do tell us! What has happened?"

"Where's Delia?" said the old man.

"Oh, she's in the bedroom out of the parlour. She ain't been out yet. Mr. Thayer, for mercy's sake, what is the matter? What has happened to him?"

David Thayer waved her aside and kept

straight on, his long yellow face immovable, his gaunt old shoulders resolutely braced, through the parlour, and knocked at the bedroom door.

A nervously shaking woman in black silk opened it. She screamed when she saw him. "Oh, Mr. Thayer, it's you! What is the matter? Where is he?" she gasped, clutching his arm.

A young woman in a pearl-coloured silk gown stood, straight and silent, behind her. She had a tall, full figure, and there was something grand in her attitude. She stood like a young pine tree, as if she had all necessary elements of support in her own self. Her features were strong and fine. She would have been handsome if her complexion had been better. Her skin was thick and dull.

She did not speak, but stood looking at David Thayer. Her mouth was shut tightly, her eyes steady. She might have been braced to meet a wind.

There were several other women in the little room. Mr. Thayer looked at them uneasily. "I want to see Delia an' her mother, an' nobody else," said he, finally.

The women started and looked at each other; they then left. The old man closed the door after them and turned to Delia.

Her mother had begun to cry. "Oh, dear! oh dear!" she wailed. "I knew somethin' dreadful had happened."

"Delia," said he, "I don't know what you're goin' to say. It ain't very pleasant for me to tell you. I wish this minute Lawrence Thayer didn't belong to me. But that don't better matters any. He does, an' somebody's got to tell you."

"Oh, is he dead?" asked Delia's mother, brokenly.

"No, he ain't dead," said the old man; "an' he ain't sick. I don't know of anything that ails him except he's a fool. He won't come—that's the whole of it."

"Won't come!" shrieked the mother. Delia stood stiff and straight.

"No, he won't come. His mother an' I have been talkin' an' reasonin' with him, but it hasn't done any good. I don't know but it'll kill his mother. It's all on account of that Briggs girl; you might as well know it. I wish she'd never come near the house. I've seen what way the wind blew for some time, but I never dreamed it would come to this. I think it's a sudden start on his part. I believe he meant to come, this noon, as much as could be; but Olive came home an' they were talkin' together in the parlour, an' I see she'd been cryin'. His mother an' I got ready, an' when he didn't come downstairs she went up to see where he was. He had his door locked an' he called out he wasn't goin'; that was all we could get out of him. He wouldn't say another word, but we knew what the trouble was. His mother had noticed how red Olive's eyes were when she went back to the shop. She'd been takin' on, I suppose, an' so he decided, all of a sudden, he'd back out. There ain't any excuse for him, an' I ain't goin' to make up any. He's treated you mean, Delia, an' I'd rather have cut off my right hand than had it happened; that's all I can say about it, an' that don't do any good."

Mrs. Caldwell stepped forward suddenly. "I should think he had treated her mean!" she said—her voice rose loud and shrill. "I never heard anything like it. If I had a son like that, I wouldn't tell of it. That Briggs girl! He ought to be strung up. If you an' his mother had had any sort of spunk you'd made him come. You always babied him to death. He's a rascal. I'd like to get hold of him, that's all. I——"

Delia caught her mother by the arm. "Mother, if you have any sense, or feeling for me, don't talk so loud; all those folks out there will hear."

The older woman's shrill vituperation flowed through the daughter's remonstrance and beyond it. "I would like to show him he couldn't do such things as this without gettin' some punishment for it. I——"

"Mother!"

Mrs. Caldwell changed her tone suddenly. She began to cry weakly. "Oh, Delia, you poor child, what will you do?" she sobbed.

"It isn't going to do any good to go on so, mother."

"There's all them folks out there. Oh dear! What will they say? I wouldn't care so much if it wa'n't for all them Thayers an' Caldwells. They'll jest crow. Oh dear! you poor child!"

Delia turned to Mr. Thayer. "Somebody ought to tell them," said she, "that—there won't be any—wedding."

"Oh, Delia, how can you take it so calm?" wailed her mother.

"I suppose so," assented the old man "but I declare I can't tell 'em such a thing about a son of mine. I feel as if I'd been through about all I could."

"The minister would be a good one, wouldn't he?" said Delia.

Mr. Thayer took up with the suggestion eagerly. He opened the door a chink, and asked one of the waiting officious guests to summon the minister. When he came he gave him instructions in an agitated whisper; then retreated. The trio in the bedroom became conscious of a great hush without; then the minister's solemnly inflected voice broke upon it. He was telling them that the wedding was postponed. Then there was a little responsive murmur, and the minister knocked on the door.

"Shall I tell them when it will take place? They are inquiring," he whispered.

Delia heard him. "You can tell them it will never take place," said she, in a clear voice.

The minister stared at her wonderingly. "Oh!" groaned her mother. Then the minister's voice rose again, and directly there were a creaking and rustling, and subdued clatter of voices. The guests were departing.

After a little, Delia approached the door as if she were going out into the parlour.

"Oh, Delia, don't go! Wait till they're all gone!" wailed her mother. "All them Thayers and Caldwells!"

"They are gone, most of them. I've stood in this hot little room long enough," said Delia, and threw open the door. Directly opposite was a mahogany table, with the wedding presents on it. Three or four women, among them Mrs. Erastus Thayer and her daughter, were bending over them and whispering.

¶

WHEN the door opened they turned and stared at Delia standing there in her pearl-coloured silk, with some drooping white bridal flowers on her breast. They looked stiff and embarrassed. Then Mrs. Thayer recovered herself and came forward.

"Delia," said she, in a soft whisper, "dear girl."

She put her arm around Delia, and attempted to draw her toward herself; but the girl released herself and gave her a slight backward push.

"Please don't make any fuss over me, Mrs. Thayer," said she; "it isn't necessary."

Mrs. Thayer started back and went toward the door. Her face was very red. She tried to smile. Her daughter and the other women followed her.

"I'm real glad she can show some temper about it," she whispered when they were all out in the entry. "It's a good deal better for her."

"Ask her why he didn't come," one of the women whispered, nudging her.

"I'm kind of afraid to. I'll stop and ask Hiram on my way home. Mebbe Mr. Thayer told him."

Delia, in her bridal gear, stood majestically beside one of the parlour windows. She was plainly waiting for her guests to go. They kept peering in at her, while they whispered among themselves. Presently Mrs. Thayer's daughter came across the room tremblingly. She had hesitated on the parlour threshold, but her mother had given her a slight push on her slender shoulders and she had entered suddenly. She kept looking back as she advanced toward Delia.

"Mother wants to know," she faltered, in her thin girlish pipe, "if—you wouldn't rather—she'd—take back that toilet set she brought. She says she don't know but it will make you feel bad to see it."

"Of course you can take it."

"Mrs. Emmons says she'll take her mats, too, if you'd like to have her."

"Of course she can take them."

The young girl shrank over to the table, snatched up the toilet set and mats, and fled to her mother.

When they were all gone, David Thayer approached Delia. He had been sitting on a chair by the bedroom door, holding his head in his hands.

"I'm goin' now," said he. 'If there's anything I can do, you let me know."

"There won't be anything," said Delia. "I shall get along all right."

He shook her hand hard in his old trembling one. "You're more of a man than Lawrence is," said he. He was a very old man, and his voice, although it was still deep, quavered.

"There isn't any use in your saying much to him," said Delia. "I don't want you to, on my account."

"Delia, don't you go to standin' up for him. He don't deserve it."

"I ain't standing up for him. I know he's your son, but it doesn't seem to me there's a great deal to stand up for. What he's done is natural enough; he's been carried away by a pretty face; but he has shown out what he is."

"I don't blame you for feelin' so, Delia."

" I don't see any other way to feel; it's the truth."

" Well, good-bye, Delia. I hope you won't lay up anything again' his mother an' me. We'll always think a good deal of you."

" I haven't any reason to lay up anything against you that I know of," said Delia. Her manner was stern, although she did not mean it to be. She could not, as it were, relax her muscles enough to be cordial. All the strength in Delia Caldwell's nature was now concentrated. It could accomplish great things, but it might grind little ones to pieces.

" Well, good-bye, Delia," said the old man, piteously. He was himself a strong character, but he seemed weak beside her.

After he had gone, Delia went into the bedroom to her mother. Mrs. Caldwell was sitting there crying. She looked up when her daughter entered.

" Oh, Delia," she sobbed, " what are you goin' to do? What are you goin' to do? "

" I am going to take off this dress, for one thing."

" I don't see what you will do. There you've got this dress and your black silk, two new silk dresses, and your new brown woollen one, and your new bonnet and mantle, all these new things, and the weddin' cake."

" I suppose I can wear dresses and bonnets just as well if I ain't married; and as for the wedding cake, we'll have some of it for supper."

" Delia Caldwell! "

" What's the matter, mother? "

Delia slipped off the long shimmering skirt of her pearl-coloured silk, shook it out, and laid it carefully over a chair.

" Are you crazy? "

" Not that I know of. Why? "

" You don't act natural."

" I'm acting the way that's natural to me."

" What are you going to do? Oh, you poor child! "

Mrs. Caldwell laid hold of her daughter's hand as she passed near her, and attempted to pull her to her side.

" Don't, please, mother," said Delia.

Her mother relinquished her hold and sobbed afresh. " I won't pity you if you don't want me to," said she, " but it's dreadful. There's—another—thing. You've lost your school. Flora Strong's spoke for it, an' she won't want to give it up."

" I don't want her to. I'll get another one."

Delia put on a calico dress and kindled a fire and made tea as usual. She put some slices of wedding cake on the table; perhaps her will extended to her palate and kept it from tasting like dust and ashes to her. Her mother drank a cup of tea between her lamentations.

After supper Delia packed up her wedding gifts and addressed them to their respective donors. There were a few bits of silver, but the greater number of the presents were pieces of fancywork from female relatives. She folded these mats and tidies relentlessly with her firm brown fingers. There was no tenderness in her touch. She felt not the least sentiment toward inanimate things.

" I think they're actin' awful mean to want to grab these things back so quick," said her mother, her wrath gaining upon her grief a little.

" It goes well with the rest," said Delia.

Among the gifts which she returned was a little embroidered tidy from Flora Strong, the girl who had been engaged to teach her former school.

Flora came over early the next morning. She opened the door and stood there hesitating. She was bashful before the trouble in the house. " Good morning, Mrs. Caldwell; good morning, Delia," she faltered, deprecatingly. She had a thin, pretty face, with very red lips and cheeks. She fumbled a little parcel nervously.

" Good mornin', Flora," said Mrs. Caldwell. Then she turned her back and went into the pantry.

Delia was washing dishes at the sink. She spoke just as she always did. " Good morning," said she. " Sit down, won't you, Flora? "

Then Flora began. " Oh, Delia," she burst out, " what made you send this back? What made you? You didn't think I'd take it? "

" Take what? "

" This tidy. Oh, Delia, I made it for you! It doesn't make any difference whether——" Flora choked with sobs. She dropped into a chair and put her handkerchief over her face. Mrs. Caldwell heard her, and began weeping, as she stood in the pantry. Delia went on with her dishes.

" Oh, Delia, you'll—take it back, won't you? " Flora said, finally.

" Of course I will, if you want me to. It's real pretty."

" When I heard of it," the girl went on—" I don't know as you want me to speak of

it, but I've got to—I felt as if—I declare I'd like to see Lawrence Thayer come up with. I'll never speak to him again as long as I live. Delia, you aren't standing up for him, are you? You don't care if I do say he's—a villain?"

"I hope she don't," wailed her mother in the pantry.

"No," said Delia, "I don't care."

Then Flora offered to give up the school. She pleaded that she should take it, but Delia would not. She could get another, she said.

That afternoon, indeed, she went to see the committee. She had put the house to rights, pinned Flora's tidy on the big rocking-chair in the parlour, and dressed herself carefully in a blue-sprigged muslin, one of her wedding gowns. Passing down the hot village street, she saw women sewing at their cool sitting-room windows. She looked up at them and nodded as usual. She knew of a school whose teacher had left to be married, as she had done. She thought the vacancy had possibly not been filled. Very little of the vacation had passed. Moreover, the school was not a desirable one: the pay was small, and it was three miles from the village. Delia obtained the position.

Early in September she began her duties. She went staunchly back and forth over the rough, dusty road day after day. She had the reputation of being a very fine teacher, although the children were a little in awe of her. They never came to meet her and hang about her on her way to the schoolhouse. Her road lay past the Thayer house, where she would have been living now had all gone well. Occasionally she met Lawrence; she passed him without a look. Quite often she met Olive Briggs, who worked in a milliner's shop and boarded at Lawrence's father's. She always bowed to her pleasantly. She had seen her in the shop although she had no real acquaintance with her. The girl was pretty, with the prettiness that Delia lacked. Her face was sweet and rosy and laughing. She was fine and small, and moved with a sort of tremulous lightness like a butterfly. Delia, meeting her, seemed to tramp.

Everybody thought Lawrence and Olive Briggs would be married. They went to evening meetings together, and to ride. Lawrence had a fine horse. Delia was at every evening meeting. She watched her old lover enter with the other girl, and never shrank. She also looked at them riding past.

"Did you see them, Delia?" her mother asked in a fluttering voice one afternoon. She and Delia were sitting at the front windows, and Lawrence and Olive had just whirred by the house.

"Yes."

"You kept so still, I didn't know as you did."

People kept close watch over Lawrence and Olive and Delia. Lawrence was subjected to a mild species of ostracism by a certain set of the village girls, Delia's mates—honest, simple young souls; they would not speak to him on the street. They treated Olive with rough, rural stiffness when they traded with her in the one milliner's shop. She was an out-of-town girl, and had always been regarded with something of suspicion. These village women had a strong local conservatism. They eyed strangers long before they admitted them.

¶

AS for Delia, the young women friends of her own age treated her with a sort of deferential sympathy. They dared not openly condole with her, but they made her aware of their partisanship. As a general thing no one except a Thayer or a Caldwell alluded to the matter in her presence. The relatives of the two families were open enough in expressing themselves either with recrimination or excuse for Lawrence, or with sympathy or covert blame for Delia. She heard the most of it, directly or indirectly. Like many New England towns, this was almost overshadowed by the ramifications of a few family trees. A considerable portion of the population was made up of these Thayers and Caldwells—two honourable and respectable old names. They were really, for the most part, kindly and respectable people, conscious of no ill intentions, and probably possessed of few. Some of them expostulated against receiving back those vain bridal gifts, but Delia insisted. Some of them were more willing to give than she to receive their honest and most genuine sympathy, however ungracefully they might proffer it.

Still the fine and exquisite stabs which Delia Caldwell had to take from her own relations and those of her foresworn bridegroom were innumerable. There are those good and innocent-hearted people who

seem to be furnished with stings only for those of their own kind; they are stingless toward others. In one way this fact may have proved beneficial to Delia: while engaged in active defence against outside attacks, she had no time to sting herself.

She girded on that pearl-coloured silk as if it were chain armour, and went to merry-makings. She made calls in that fine black silk and white-plumed wedding bonnet. It seemed at times as if she were fairly running after her trouble; she did more than look it in the face.

It was in February when Delia had been teaching her new school nearly two terms that Olive Briggs left town. People said she had given up her work and gone home to get ready to be married.

Delia's mother heard of it, and told her. "I should think she'd be awful afraid he wouldn't come to the weddin'," she said, bitterly.

"So should I," assented Delia. She echoed everybody's severe remarks about Lawrence.

It might have been a month later when Flora Strong ran in one morning before school. "I've just heard the greatest news!" she panted. "What do you think—she's jilted him!"

"Jilted whom?"

"Olive Briggs—she's jilted Lawrence Thayer. She's going to be married to another fellow in May. I had it from Milly Davis. She writes to her. It's so."

"I can't believe it," Mrs. Caldwell said, quivering.

"Well, it's so. I declare I jumped right up and down when I heard of it. Delia, aren't you glad?"

"I don't know what difference it can make to me."

"I mean aren't you glad he's got his pay?"

"Yes, I am," said Delia, with slow decision.

"She wouldn't be human if she wasn't," said her mother. Mrs. Caldwell was cold and trembling with nervousness. She stood grasping the back of a chair. "But I'm afraid it ain't so. Are you sure it's so, Flora?"

"Mrs. Caldwell, I know it's so."

Delia on her way to school that morning looked at the Thayer house as she passed. "I wonder how *he* feels," she said to herself. She saw Lawrence Thayer, in her stead, in the midst of all that covert ridicule and obloquy, that galling sympathy, that agony of jealousy and betrayed trust. They distorted his face like flames; she saw him writhe through their liquid wavering.

She pressed her lips together and marched along. At that moment, had she met Lawrence, she would have passed him with a fiercer coldness than ever, but if she had seen the girl she would have been ready to fly at her.

The village tongues were even harder on Lawrence than they had been on her. The sight of a person bending toward the earth with the weight of his just deserts upon his shoulders is generally gratifying and amusing even to his friends. Then there was more open rudeness among the young men who were Lawrence's mates. They jeered him everywhere. He went about doggedly. He was strong in silence, but he had a sweet womanish face which showed the marks of words quickly. He was still very young. Delia was two years older than he, and looked ten. Still, Lawrence seemed as old in some respects. He was a quiet, shy young man, who liked to stay at home with his parents and never went about much with the young people. Before Olive came he had seldom spoken to any girl besides Delia. They had been together soberly and steadily ever since their school days.

Some people said now, "Don't you suppose Lawrence Thayer will go with Delia again?" But the answer always was, "She won't look at him."

## ¶

ONE Sunday afternoon, about a year after Olive Briggs's marriage, Mrs. Caldwell said to Delia, as they were walking home from church, "I jest want to know if you noticed how Lawrence Thayer stared at you in meetin' this afternoon?"

"No, I didn't," said Delia. She was looking uncommonly well that day. She wore her black silk, and had some dark-red roses in her bonnet.

"Well, he never took his eyes off you. Delia, that feller would give all his old shoes to come back, if you'd have him."

"Don't talk so foolish, mother."

"He would—you depend on it."

"I'd like to see him," said Delia, sternly. There was a red glow on her dull, thick cheeks.

"Well, I say so, too," said her mother.

The next night, when Delia reached the Thayer house on her way from school,

Lawrence's mother stood at the gate. She had a little green shawl over her head. She was shivering; the wind blew up cool. Just behind her in the yard there was a little peach tree all in blossom.

She held out her hand mutely when Delia reached her. The girl did not take it. "Good evening," said she, and was passing.

"Can't you stop jest a minute, Delia?"

"Was there anything you wanted?"

"Can't you come into the house jest a minute? I wanted to see you about somethin'"

"I don't believe I can to-night, Mrs. Thayer."

"There ain't anybody there. There was somethin' I wanted to see you about."

The green shawl was bound severely around her small, old face with its peaked chin. She reached out her long, wrinkled hand over the gate, and clutched Delia's arm softly.

"Well, I'll come in a minute." Delia followed Mrs. Thayer past the blooming peach tree into the house.

The old woman dragged forward the best rocking-chair tremblingly. "Sit down, dear," said she. Then she seated herself close beside her, and, leaning forward, gazed into her face with a sort of deprecating mildness. She even laid hold of one of her hands, but the girl drew it away softly. There was a gentle rustic demonstrativeness about Lawrence's mother which had always rather abashed Delia, who was typically reserved. "I wanted to speak to you about Lawrence," said the old woman. Delia sat stiffly erect, her head turned away. "I can't bear to think you are always goin' to feel so hard toward him, Delia. Did you know it?"

Delia half arose. "There isn't any use in bringing all this up again, Mrs. Thayer; it's all past now."

"Sit down jest a minute, dear. I want to talk to you. I know you've got good reason to blame him; but there's some excuse. He wa'n't nothin' but a boy, an' she was sweet-lookin', an' she took on dreadful. You'd thought she was goin' to die. It's turned out jest the way I knew 'twould. I told Lawrence how 'twould be then. I see right through her. She meant well enough. I s'pose she thought she was in love with Lawrence; but she was flighty. She went home and saw another fellow, an' Lawrence was nowhere. He didn't care so much as folks thought. Delia, I'm goin' to tell you the truth: he thought more of you than he did of her the whole time. You look as if you thought I was crazy, but I ain't. She jest bewitched him a little spell, but you was at the bottom of his heart always—you *was*, Delia." The old woman broke into sobs.

Delia rose. "I'd better go. There isn't any use in bringing this up, Mrs. Thayer."

"Don't go, Delia—don't. I wanted to tell you. He got to talkin' with me a little the other Sabbath night. It's the first time he's said a word, but he felt awful bad, an' I questioned him. Says he, 'Mother, I don't dream of such a thing as her havin' of me, or carin' anything about me again; but I do feel as if I should like to do somethin' if I could, to make up to her a little for the awful wrong I've done her.' That was jest the words he said. Delia, he ain't such a bad boy as you think he is, after all. You hadn't ought to despise him."

"He'll have to do something to show I've got some reason not to, then," said Delia. She looked immovably at the old woman, who was struggling with her sobs. She told her mother of the conversation after she got home.

"You did jest right," said Mrs. Caldwell. "I wouldn't knuckle to 'em if I was in your place." She was getting tea. After they had finished the meal and sat idly at the table for a few minutes, she looked across at her daughter suddenly, with embarrassed sharpness. "Speakin' about Lawrence, you wouldn't feel as if you ever could take him, anyhow, would you?" said she.

"Mother, what are you talking about?"

In a few weeks the anniversary of Delia's defeated wedding came. She spoke of it herself after dinner. She and her mother were making currant jelly.

"Why, it's my wedding day, mother," said she. "I ought to have put on my wedding gown and eaten some wedding cake, instead of making jelly."

"Don't talk so, child," said her mother. Sometimes Delia's hardihood startled her.

Delia was pressing the currants in a muslin bag, and the juice was running through her fingers, when there was a loud knock at the door.

"Why, who's that?" her mother said, fluttering. She ran and peeped through the sitting-room blinds. "It's Mrs. 'Rastus Thayer," she motioned back, "an' Milly."

"I'll go to the door," said Delia. She

washed her hands hurriedly and went. She noticed with surprise that the two visitors were dressed in their Sunday best, Mrs. Thayer in her nicely kept cinnamon-brown silk, and Milly in her freshly starched white muslin. They had an air of constrained curiosity about them as they entered and took their seats in the parlour.

Delia sat down with them and tried to talk. Pretty soon her mother, who had prinked a little, entered; but just as she did so there was another knock. Some of the Caldwell cousins had come this time. They also were finely dressed, and entered with that same soberly expectant air. They were hardly seated before others arrived. Delia, going to the door this time, saw the people coming by twos and threes up the streets. They flocked in, and she brought chairs. Nothing disturbed her outward composure; but her mother grew pale and tremulous. She no longer tried to speak; she sat staring. At two o'clock the rooms were filled with that same company who had assembled to see Delia wedded two years before.

¶

THEY sat around the walls in stiff silence; they seemed to be waiting. Delia was not imaginative, nor given to morbid fancies; but sitting there in the midst of that mysterious company, in her cotton gown, with her hands stained with currant juice, she fairly began to believe that it was a dream. Were not these people mere phantoms of the familiar village folk assembling after this truly fantastic manner, and sitting here in this ghostly silence? Was not the whole a phantasmagoria of the last moments of her sweet old happiness and belief in truth? Was not she, herself, disenchanted, with her cotton gown and stained hands, the one real thing in it?

The scent of the pinks came in the window, and she noticed that. "How real it all is!" she thought. "But I shall wake up before long." It was like one of those dreams in which one clings staunchly to the consciousness of the dream and will not sink beneath its terrors.

When Lawrence Thayer entered she seemed to wake violently. She half rose from her seat, then sank down again. Her mother screamed.

Lawrence Thayer stood by the parlour door, where everybody in the two rooms could hear him. His gentle, beardless face was pale as death, but the pallor revealed some strong lines which his youthful bloom had softened. He was slender, and stooped a little naturally; now he was straight as a reed. He had a strange look to these people who had always known him.

"Friends," he began, in a solemn, panting voice, "I—have—asked you to come here on the anniversary of the day on which Delia Caldwell and I were to have been married, to make to her, before you all, the restitution in my power. I don't do it to put myself before you in a better light: God, who knows everything, knows I don't; it's for *her*. I was a coward, and mean, and it's going to last. Nothing that I can do now is going to alter that. All I want now is to make up to her a little for what she's been through. Two years ago to-day she stood before you all rejected and slighted. Now look at me in her place."

Then he turned to Delia with a stiff motion. It was like solemn, formal oratory, but its terrible earnestness gave it heat. "Delia Caldwell, I humbly beg your pardon. I love you better than the whole world, and I ask you to be my wife."

"I never will." It was as if Delia's whole nature had been set to these words; they had to be spoken. She had risen, and stood staring at him so intently that the whole concourse of people vanished in blackness. She saw only his white face. All the thoughts in her brain spread wings and flew, swiftly circling. She heard what he said, and she heard her own thoughts with a strange double consciousness. All those days came back—the sweet old confidences, the old looks and ways. That pale speaking face was Lawrence's—Lawrence's; not that strange other's who had left her for that pink-faced girl. This revelation of his inner self, which smote the others with a sense of strangeness, thrilled her with the recognition of love. "A coward and mean." Yes, he had been, but—— Yes, there was some excuse for him—there was. Is not every fault wedded to its own excuse, that pity may be born into the world? He was as honest in what he was saying as a man could be. He could have had no hope that she would marry him. He knew her enduring will, her power of indignation. This was no subtle scheme for his own advantage. Even these people would not think that. They would not, indeed, believe him capable of it. The system of terrible but coolly calculated ventures for success was

one with which this man would not be likely to grapple. He was honest in this. There sat all the Thayers and Caldwells. How they would talk and laugh at him!

Lawrence turned to go. He had bowed silently when she gave him her quick answer. There was a certain dignity about him. He had in reality pulled himself up to the level of his own noble, avowed sentiments.

Delia stood gazing after him. She looked so relentless that she was almost terrible. One young girl, staring at her, began to cry.

Mrs. Erastus Thayer sat near the door. Delia's eyes glanced from Lawrence to her face. Then she sprang forward.

"You needn't look at him in that way," she cried out. "I am going to marry him. Lawrence, come back!"

*(Another Great Love Story will appear in next month's "Argosy.")*

# *A Very Strange Bargain*

WHAT was my horror to see the man in grey come behind with the evident purpose of accosting me. He raised his hat and bowed with a more profound obeisance than I had ever been honoured with. I returned the courtesy, and stood bare-headed in the sun as if rooted to the ground. I stared at him in an agony of terror, like a bird under the spell of a serpent. He seemed greatly embarrassed, did not raise his eyes, bowed repeatedly, approached me, and began to speak in a gentle, wavering voice, with the tone of a mendicant.

"I trust your Honour will have the kindness to pardon my presumption in venturing to address you, being a stranger. I have a very particular request to make. Graciously permit me, sir——"

"For heaven's sake," I cried in terror, "what can I do for a man who——" We both stopped, and, as it seemed to me, we blushed.

After a moment of silence he began again. "During the short time that it was my good fortune to enjoy the presence of your company, I have had occasion more than once to gaze—if you will permit me to say so—with inexpressible admiration upon the well-formed, handsome shadow which, with an air of noble disdain, as if scorning to set any value upon it, you cast behind you. It is a superb shadow you have there lying at your feet. Pardon the temerity of the suggestion would it be possible to induce you to sell this same shadow to me?"

He ceased speaking, and it seemed as if a wheel were going around in my head. What was I to make of this remarkable proposition? He must be crazy. I thought, and in an altered voice, more suited to the humility of his tone, I replied—

"Go to, good friend; have you not enough with your own shadow? What you propose is a very strange bargain." He interrupted me with, "I have many a useful thing in my pocket that your Honour might find convenient; for this inestimable shadow there is no price I should deem too high. To show my gratitude to you, sir, I would give you your own choice of all the treasures I carry about with me. I have miraculous wands of the witch-hazel, I have Mercury's cap and potent draughts, the dish-cloth of Roland's page, and a Homunculus, but best of all is the magic purse of Fortunatus." "A magic purse," I interrupted him, and great as was my horror, he had captured my sensibilities with that word. A deathly giddiness came over me, and rows of ducats seemed to twinkle before my eyes.

A. VON CHAMISSO.

# *The Cult of Beauty*

## Breaking the Spell

WE like to see a crag jut out in shameless derision from the cliff, we like to see the red pines stand up hardily upon a high cliff, we like to see a chasm cloven from end to end of a mountain. With equally noble enthusiasm we like to see a nose jut out derisively, we like to see the red hair of a friend stand up hardily in bristles upon his head, we like to see his mouth broad and clean cut like the mountain crevasse. At least some of us like all this; it is not a question of humour. We do not burst with amusement at the first sight of the pines or the chasm; but we like them because they are expressive of the dramatic stillness of Nature, her bold experiments, her definite departures, her fearlessness and savage pride in her children. The moment we have snapped the spell of conventional beauty, there are a million beautiful faces waiting for us everywhere, just as there are a million beautiful spirits.

G. K. Chesterton.

CHERISHING Beauty, deep in thy heart of hearts,
Folding her, Artist, call her not, dream her not
Thine. Are the sweet cold fires of moonlight
Lulled in a single lakelet's bosom?

Calm they glide with the river, the cataract
Hurls down light with its thunder, the fisherman
Wakes new glory on ocean, lifting
Silvered nets and a gleaming burden.

Richard Garnett.

## In the Beholder

LIKING is not always the child of beauty, but whatsoever is liked, to the liker is beautiful.

Sir Philip Sidney.

## Substance and Spirit

THAT is not the most perfect beauty, which, in public, would attract the greatest observation; nor even that which the statuary would admit to be a faultless piece of clay, kneaded up with blood. But that is true beauty which has not only a substance, but a spirit—a beauty that we must intimately know, justly to appreciate—a beauty lighted up in conversation, where the mind shines as it were through its casket, where, in the language of the poet, "the eloquent blood spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought, that we might almost say her body thought." An order and a mode of beauty which, the more we know, the more we accuse ourselves for not having before discovered those thousand graces which bespeak that their owner has a soul. This is that beauty which never cloys, possessing charms as resistless as those of the fascinating Egyptian for which Antony wisely paid the bauble of a world—a beauty like the rising of his own Italian suns, always enchanting, never the same.

Caleb C. Colton.

## A Perpetual Stimulus

THE love of the beautiful calls man to fresh exertions, and awakens him to a more noble life; and the glory of it is, that as painters imitate, and poets sing, and statuaries carve, and architects rear up the gorgeous trophies of their skill—as everything becomes beautiful, and orderly, and magnificent—the activity of the mind rises to still greater, and to better objects. The principles of justice are sought out; the powers of the ruler, and the rights of the subject, are fixed; man advances to the enjoyment of rational liberty, and to the establishment of those great moral laws, which God has written in our hearts to regulate the destinies of the world. Sydney Smith.

A THING of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness, but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirit. John Keats.

## What Beauty Is

THE beautiful is a manifestation of secret laws of Nature which, but for this appearance, had been for ever concealed from us.

J. W. von Goethe.

## Harmonious Development

THE sense of beauty is not the same as the instinctive desire to express beauty; the development and improvement of this latter faculty belongs properly to schools of art. If your boy, even in the school-room, be taught to produce instead of only to feel and see beautiful forms and beautiful thoughts, he is as much spoiled as if he were a father before being a lover. Nothing is more dangerous, either for art or heart, than the premature expression of feeling; many a poetic genius has been fatally chilled by delicious draughts of Hippocrene in the warm season of youth. The feelings of the poet, especially, should be closely and coolly covered, and the hardest and driest sciences should retard the bursting blossoms till the due spring-time. Jean Paul Richter.

## The Sublime and Beautiful Compared

SUBLIME objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smoothed and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great, in many cases, loves the right line; and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation: beauty should not be obscure: the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate: the great ought to be solid, and even massive. Edmund Burke.

## Golden Evening, Golden Music

THE blackbirds and the sunsets never tired him, only gave him an uneasy feeling that he could not get enough of them. Staring into the stilly radiance of the early evening and at the little gold and white flowers on the lawn, a thought came to him: This weather was like the music of "Orfeo," which he had recently heard at Covent Garden. A beautiful opera, not like Meyerbeer, nor even quite Mozart, but, in its way, perhaps even more lovely; something classical and of the Golden Age about it, chaste and mellow, and the Ravogli "almost worthy of the old days"—highest praise he could bestow. The yearning of Orpheus for the beauty he was losing, for his love going down to Hades, as in life love and beauty did go—the yearning which sang and throbbed through the golden music, stirred also in the lingering beauty of the world that evening.

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

HARD is the task, and bold the adventurous flight
Of him who dares in praise of beauty write.

WILLIAM CONGREVE.

O, HOW much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.
The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,
Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly
When summer's breath their maskéd buds discloses:
But, for their virtue only is their show,
They live unwooed and unrespected fade;
Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

## Some Classic Views

SOCRATES called beauty a short-lived tyranny; Plato, a privilege of nature; Theophrastus, a silent cheat; Theocritus, a delightful prejudice; Carneades, a solitary Kingdom; Domitian said that nothing was more grateful; Aristotle affirmed that beauty was better than all the letters of recommendation in the world; Homer, that it was a glorious gift of nature; and Ovid, alluding to him, calls it a favour bestowed by the gods.

FROM THE ITALIAN.

## An Eternal Possession

BEAUTY is the only thing that time cannot harm. Philosophies fall away like sand, creeds follow one another, but what is beautiful is a joy for all seasons, a possession for all eternity. OSCAR WILDE.

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*A Brilliant New Three-Part Novel*

# Black Roses

*A vivid and picturesque romance of Neapolitan life*

By FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

PART II

**Previous Chapters**

A VISIT to Naples recalls to Paolo Ricci, a fashionable portrait painter, certain romantic episodes of the past; and as he wanders among the scenes where they occurred he reconstructs the story of his life.

The son of Samnite peasants, a fiery and obstinate Southern Italian race, Paolo was born in a little village among the vineyards of the Neapolitan Appenines. His father was a prominent local character who mixed medicines for the villagers, and by driving hard bargains in land transactions, hoarded gold and silver with which it was his intention to educate Paolo for the medical profession.

But Paolo was a born artist, and from early boyhood he drew and painted in secret, sometimes, when paper was not available, practising on walls, or even in the dust on the ground. Under the spell of his first love adventure, he indiscreetly reveals his ambition, and village gossip soon brings it to the ears of his father. Only the tact of Paolo's mother saves him from the savage old peasant's anger at this unexpected frustration of his plans.

The sudden death of his father opens up a new life for Paolo. His mother, who sympathises with his artistic aspirations, invites the aid of Paolo's uncle, Don Alessandro, upon whose advice the young artist is sent to Naples to study under Gennaro, a famous sculptor. Here Paolo lodges with Pietro Viva, a young medical student whose temperament is a curious mixture of romanticism and cynicism. Pietro acts the part of mentor to the shy, inexperienced Paolo.

Over their cups Pietro talks to Paolo of the delights and dangers of love and the hazards of an artist's life. He tells Paolo that he must get rich and dress well if he wishes to attract the Neopolitan beauties around them. He advises him to leave Gennaro and strike out on his own.

Paolo considers this. Meanwhile his curiosity is excited by Cristina, " the strange pale woman with a sad mouth," who keeps the lodging-house where the two young men live. Cristina appears to live in constant dread of a coarse-featured man who lives in the same house, and who, although he is not her husband, has evidently a strong influence over her actions.

THAT room, that bare room on the third floor of the house in the Vicolo de Angelis, whose windows, thrown open at daylight, disclosed the prospect that had enchanted him on first acquaintance, became the central shrine of Paolo's life.

Every morning, as Don Alessandro had craftily arranged, he left them for the studio at the back of the shop in the Toledo which supplied material for that great artist Gennaro's, trade, a chilly room top-lighted by windows thick with dust, in which half-a-dozen of craftsmen and apprentices produced the plaster casts and painted panels which foreigners and sailors bought for souvenirs.

Gennaro knew his trade requirements backwards; by calculated eliminations he had reduced his studio's repertoire to a small number of models that were certain to tempt the most modest pockets. The statuettes, in white or terra-cotta, represented flower-girls, fisher-boys and tarantella-dancers, and were planned to face each other in pairs on either side of a mantelpiece. His pictures portrayed the same set of characters in brilliant colours against appropriate backgrounds, with Vesuvius at night in blood-red eruption, the blue grotto at Capri, and all Naples, with the great stone-pine on the Vomero added. These subjects were painted on planed panels of olive wood, imported from Sorrento, and priced according to the area that they covered and the quantity of pigment used in them. The work was organised with a mechanical precision, and the duty of Paolo, as the youngest and latest comer, was to fill in the sky and use as little paint on it as possible.

A week of this useless monotony reduced poor Paolo to despair. He confided his troubles to Pietro, who insisted on treating the whole matter as a joke.

" Gennaro's a wise man," he said. " He knows his requirements and sticks to them;

and old Alessandro was right—when you know as much as he does you'll be in a position to make your fortune. You'd better go out to Posillipo on Sunday and choose the villa that takes your fancy."

"But I want to paint," Paolo told him. "That isn't painting. Anyone with a goat's intelligence could do what I'm doing now. You could do it yourself."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Viva. "Evidently, then, you're not cut out for making a fortune."

"Fortune! If I were paid, it'd be another matter. I'm merely wasting time. The only person who gains by it is Gennaro. I want canvasses, paints, an easel for myself. I want money to pay models. I want time, I tell you; I might as well be pruning vines in Pogerola."

"At Gennaro's you earn nothing. You are under no obligation. Therefore, if you leave Gennaro's you cannot be worse off than you are now. You'll have gained twelve hours a day. Whether, in those hours, you can earn enough to make any difference is another matter."

"At any rate, I can try," said Paolo.

"Then why not do so?"

"Because . . ."

There were a hundred reasons. His mother, to begin with, implicitly trusted old Alessandro's wisdom and would consider any departure from the plan with which the wine-merchant had settled his future as the first step to perdition. There would be a devil of a row, for Gennaro was bound to resent the loss of anyone who painted skies adequately and economically for nothing. It might even mean that all supplies might be stopped. Luckily, Paolo remembered, he had the money for his second month in hand.

Next day he left Gennaro's.

He painted Vesuvius at night, in blood-red eruption; but his Vesuvius was not the Vesuvius of Gennaro. He painted it as he had seen it in those nights of north-east wind, the great plume dissipated in the moment of its formation, a lurid, threatening veil, blown downward, over the brilliant city; the mountain grey, sullen and secret as some nocturnal monster risen from the sea.

In the middle of the afternoon a sudden knock on the door made him jump into his skin again. It was Don Alessandro, hot with Gragnano wine and anger, breathless with the exertion of three flights of stairs.

"What's this?" he cried. "What's this? Illness? Idleness? You don't look as if you were ill. Signor Gennaro has sent me a message. What are you doing here?"

"I have left Gennaro's," Paolo explained with a composure that astonished himself.

"You've left Gennaro's?" Don Alessandro spluttered. "By whose permission—by what right have you left Gennaro's? You must be mad. Without a word of explanation! And now you stare at me with a brazen face. You must explain."

There was nothing to explain. He put the matter as Viva had put it.

"No obligation?" Don Alessandro cried. "Understand you are under the obligation of my word: my word, which has never been doubted in all the province. I gave my word that you would work there for a year."

"Without consulting me, Don Alessandro."

"Consulting *you*?" The idea was monstrous. "And who, in the name of heaven, are you, that you should be consulted? A bargain's a bargain. If folk don't stand by their bargains, the world will come to an end. When they can say that Alessandro's word is not his bond——"

"It was an unfair bargain; and, anyway, I had nothing to do with it."

"If only your poor father could hear you speak. Already you are in Signor Gennaro's debt for a month's instruction."

Paolo laughed. "It's little enough I learned."

"Then that," said Don Alessandro, "must have been your fault. Perhaps you have less talent than you imagine."

"An idiot could have learned my job in twenty-four hours. You could have done it yourself, Don Alessandro."

"An idiot? I? Is this meant for insolence?" Even Don Alessandro's anger subsided beneath his offended dignity. "Evidently neither here nor elsewhere have you been taught respect to your elders and betters. You are young and strong and have me at a disadvantage at the top of these cursed steps. What? You'll be saying next that *I* haven't helped you, that *I* haven't used all my influence to put you in the way of an honest and artistic living. This is the way you repay me. To you I will say no more. But to your poor mother——"

Paolo knew what he meant. He was going to tell a long tale to Concetta, and

Concetta was bound to believe it. He tried to put the matter out of his mind, to continue his interrupted picture. He did work. To his amazement something of his own volcanic indignation found its way into his treatment of Vesuvius. He worked until the light failed, and then threw himself on his bed and slept so deeply that Viva had to thunder on his door to wake him.

"I thought you'd committed suicide," Viva said. "If ever you contemplate anything of the kind, please consult me as an anatomist beforehand; the majority of suicides are so amateurish. What have you been doing?"

"I've been working," said Paolo. "I've finished a picture. Do you want to see it?"

"Not on an empty stomach, my friend," Viva answered brutally. "Come out and get some food."

Paolo shook his head. "I've finished with restaurants. My dinner is bread and figs until I know how things are going. You needn't be alarmed. Even my poor father used to say that an artist must starve, and starvation's better than growing fat with Gennaro."

"There's something in it," said Viva solemnly. "As a physician, I'm convinced that we eat too much and drink too little."

"You'll never die from the second, anyway," Paolo laughed. "Good night."

¶

FOUR days later there came a letter from Pogerola. Concetta had dictated it in a fever of alarm; but in its fine caligraphy Paolo recognised the hand of Don Ambrogio, an origin that was confirmed by a final exhortation to him not to miss hearing Mass on festivals in Santa Chiara. The receipt of this letter so distressed him that he finished three pictures on end while he was thinking over the terms of his reply. Even when he had written it he knew for certain that it would be misunderstood. How could he persuade them that he was working harder, and to more purpose, than ever before? Only a gesture could convince. He achieved it with reckless daring. "There is no need for you to send me money," he wrote. "By the end of this month I shall certainly be supporting myself."

It was magnificent; the written word assured him that it was true, and gave him an unjustifiable sense of independence and elation; but, as the month of trial on short commons drew towards an end the boast seemed nearly as empty as his stomach. Viva and his student friends were always ready to poke fun at Paolo and his pictures. At heart they were kindly and generous; often they invited him to eat and drink with them; but frustration and solitude made him proud and roughened his tongue, so that they ended by letting him go on his way, treating him, good-humouredly, as the grotesque that he was.

When he had finished his panels he hawked them all over Naples, offering them to every shop in whose windows pictures appeared.

"Now if you would only realise," said a smart salesman in the Via Pace, "that when a foreigner buys Vesuvius, what he wants to show his friends is a mountain spouting fire. The smoke that you have painted might just as well be cloud. Fire, and plenty of it, my boy. Something like this." And he flourished a typical example of Gennaro's Vesuvius series. In the top left-hand corner of blue-black sky Paolo notice the smudge of Gennaro's niggardly finger and an inequality in the panel that he himself had filled with stucco.

"Yes, yes, I know," he murmured. "You see, I painted it." The shopman laughed. Evidently Paolo was joking.

"I painted it," he repeated.

"Then why in heaven's name . . . ?"

And then he met Kalisch.

Kalisch was an Austrian Jew, a lean old man in spectacles, who lived and ate and slept, like a slow-moving spider, amid the dust of a basement shop on the Riviera di Chiaia. Each day, as Paolo passed its dirty windows on his endless wanderings, he saw the old man crawling about among his stores of rubbish or eating his dinner from a dirty newspaper. He sold, or offered for sale, antiquities; and, indeed, any object that stayed for long enough in his care acquired a patina of grime and dust that gave it an appearance of authentic age. Paolo approached him as a last resource; for sometimes, behind the bleared window-panes, he had seen oil paintings suspended. As he entered the shop, Kalisch's watery eyes surveyed him with disapproval. His lips were covered with crumbs, for he was in the middle of his mid-day meal.

"I have pictures for sale," said Paolo.

The old man took them from him and examined each with care, brushing away the bread crumbs that fell on them, with a

red silk handkerchief. He spoke at last with his mouth full, mumbling bread between his words.

"These are not old," he said. "Do you know who painted them?"

"I did," said Paolo, his heart fluttering.

"You painted them? H'm. You have talent. I like them. But I can't sell them. I like this one."

He held up the veiled Vesuvius that Paolo had painted in his first flush of anger and freedom. Paolo's heart warmed to him; he wanted to tell the old man how and when it was painted.

"You look hungry," said Kalisch. "Sit down with me and eat."

When they had finished, the old man took off his spectacles and smiled at Paolo with his weak eyes.

"I should like to keep this picture," he said, "not because I can sell it, but for myself. It's a poor picture, but it's clever. I can see that you want money. Well, so does everybody, including myself. Trade has never been so bad in all the forty years I've been here. So I can pay you nothing. You understand? But we will make an exchange. If there's anything in the shop that takes your fancy—up to the value of five francs—you shall have it for your picture. H'm?"

A pathetic ending to high hopes; and yet it seemed to Paolo better than nothing. Among Kalisch's rubbish there were many beautiful things that Paolo's greedy eyes detached from the grime that surrounded them. He passed from one to another eagerly. Kalisch moved, mumbling, behind him, approving his comments, yet always on the watch lest something should disappear into Paolo's pocket.

"It seems you have taste as well as talent," the old man said. "That is a thing that cannot be taught. You might be useful to me. H'm? Naples is full of good things in unlikely places, and I am too old to find them. Keep your eyes open, my son. When you see something good and cheap, you shall come and tell me about it. I will give you the money to buy it and a small commission. H'm. Yes, we'll do business together. H'm?"

Beneath his shrewdness and his guttural, grunting speech the old man was so kindly that Paolo was driven to a confession of his state. Kalisch listened without any signs of sympathy

"I'd sweep the streets," said Paolo, "if it would help me to learn to paint."

"It wouldn't," said Kalisch. "Now you are talking foolishly. I thought you were more intelligent. Foolishness and talent, unfortunately, are not incompatible. Still, if you are wise enough to listen to me, I'll tell you something."

Spiderwise, he crawled to the other side of the shop, his skinny fingers touching things as he went, as though he loved them, and holding them up to his rheumy eyes. From a high shelf, that seemed to strain his crooked back intolerably, he took a wooden casket and handed it to Paolo. It was an old Florentine box with a smooth, illuminated surface of parchment, smoky and yellow with age. In texture and colour it gave an effect of mellowness, almost of beauty. Paolo handled it with mystification. He could not conceive of it being any earthly use.

"No, it is not useful," said Kalisch. "Except for the parchment covering, it isn't old. I don't consider it beautiful. But people are always ready to buy boxes in which they think they can put something. Heaven knows why! All that you want is a box, a piece of old parchment, some glue, and a little imagination. I'll lend you this one as a model, and if you make me five others like it I'll pay you twenty francs apiece. A hundred francs in all. H'm?"

"If I could find the boxes——" Paolo began.

"If you could find them," Kalisch snorted. "You cannot find them; but any carpenter will turn them out for a couple of francs. As for the parchment, here is plenty to go on with." He pulled out a ragged portfolio crammed with pages torn from monastic missals, loot of the suppressed monasteries of the Campanian coast. "These pages," he said, "we sell for one franc each. They're getting scarcer of late—I don't know why—but you can always pick them up in shops like this in Naples. What did I say for the picture. Was it four francs?"

"Five," Paolo corrected him timidly.

"Five francs," the old man repeated, counting out five sheets of parchment as though he could not bear to part with them. "Now this is work that you can do at night. At night you make your boxes; during the day you paint. You'll never sell your pictures. When you've finished them you can use the canvasses or panels again:

but, if you feel that's too brutal, you can show them to me before you scrape them off, h'm? Now go and find your carpenter and, whatever you do, be careful of the model. Remember, that's worth fifty francs!"

"I thought you said twenty," Paolo suggested.

"Twenty to you. Fifty to me. That's the difference, h'm?" said Kalisch.

¶

WITH this the surprising commerce in illuminated, parchment-covered boxes began.

Kalisch approved his work and, what was more, he sold it and was always eager to buy more. This puzzled Paolo, for whenever he chanced to enter the shop in the Riviera de Chiaia he never saw a customer. Kalisch, indeed, handed out his money and his parchments so readily that Paolo began to suspect that he was being underpaid.

For the best part of an afternoon they argued the matter of prices; and in the end, reluctantly, the old man raised his payment from twenty to thirty francs.

The visions evoked by this new affluence nearly turned Paolo's head. He decided to abandon work for the rest of the day and enjoy the sights of the city that his labours had long denied him. It was a soft, spring evening; all Naples seemed to be taking the air in its own holiday spirits. In the hour of the Corso the streets were thronged with sleek-skinned horses and bright equipages full of dark women in their arrogant elegance. It was a vision so rare in its refinement and costliness, so poignant in its contrast to his own condition, that Paolo, with the intoxication of Kalisch's ten francs' increase still buzzing in his head, was carried away by a sudden desire to be master of the power and luxury and pride that squeezed him into the gutters of the Toledo.

In that moment of exultation all things seemed possible; but to it there succeeded another in which he saw himself as he really was: an entranced peasant, gaping at the unattainable. The truth was difficult to believe until a humiliating vision of his own shabbiness reflected in a plate-glass window reinforced reality. Then he grew angry with himself and scornful of his ambitions, so angry that he refused to look any longer at the taunting reflex, staring deliberately past it to the shelves of the shop window. There, in a place of honour, he discovered the secret of Kalisch's munificence: three of the boxes that he had finished a week before set in a row . . .

Trembling with fury and shyness he entered the shop and asked the price of them. The shopman, an elegant with bejewelled fingers, glanced at him contemptuously. "The antique caskets? A hundred francs each," he said, as though he grudged the effort of speaking to such an apparition.

"I made them," Paolo blurted out. "I made them last week."

The shopman stared at him. "You must be mistaken. These come from Florence."

"I made them, here in Naples. If you'll take them down I'll show you my initials. P.R. You can see them for yourself. I know," he went on hurriedly in his anxiety to be heard. "You bought them from Signor Kalisch, in the Riviera di Chiaia. I can make three a week. He buys them from me. If you don't mind I'd rather supply them to you direct. I've two more, ready finished. I can bring them this evening."

The shopman's eyes were still incredulous. He looked Paolo up and down taking stock of his poverty. "How much?" he said.

"Fifty francs," Paolo stammered, magnificently daring.

"I'll give you forty-five."

"In half-an-hour," said Paolo.

"In five minutes we shall be shut. To-morrow morning."

Viva, and Viva's student friends were sharers of his fury and of his triumph.

"To-morrow," Viva said, "you'll have to go to the Riviera and pull the old swine's beard. If you like I'll come with you."

"I'll never set eyes on him again," said Paolo.

"You're a queer devil, Paolo. There's something wrong with your spirit. If I were in your shoes . . ."

"He did me a good turn when I most needed it; now it's finished and we're quits."

"You beat me altogether," Viva grumbled. "Call that a good turn? Well, now you're a rich man I hope to goodness you'll live up to it. As it is, you're worse than a Franciscan. Poverty and chastity . . . My boy it's your bounden duty to expand."

They laughed together, dined sumptuously and drank a litre of wine apiece.

¶

BAD times descended on Viva. His bright and dissolute good-nature had not endeared him to his professors, and with his failure to pass terminal examinations the world collapsed about his ears. For two years he had been gaily accumulating debts that he could not pay. His father, a red, gross farmer from Gragnano, came storming up the stairs and left him like a thrashed dog. The debts, or as many as he confessed to, were paid in anticipation of his allowance. "I live on bread and onions and macaroni," said the farmer. "It's time this flaunting in cafés was stopped. Now you shall live as I do, and as your grandfather did before you. This is your last chance, so make the most of it."

In these conditions Viva was singularly, pathetically helpless. Paolo was amazed at the change in him, for he had always imagined that Viva was stronger and more independent than himself. He took pity on him, though it was a difficult and delicate business to pity Viva.

He proposed, as Don Alessandro had prudently suggested many months before, that they should keep house together. It cost, he argued, a very little more to feed two people than one.

"You crafty little devil," Viva growled. "Do you think I can't see what you're after? I don't want your charity, thank you!" But he took it all the same.

Cristina cooked for them in her basement and carried the food to table: bread and black coffee at seven, one dish at mid-day and another in the evening. When Paolo first asked her if she would do this it seemed as if she took fright.

"I don't know: it's impossible to say," she told him.

"You mean you must ask your master first?"

"Yes, I will ask him. Perhaps. If I dare . . ."

"I'll ask him myself, if you'd prefer it," said Paolo good humouredly.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "You won't do that? Promise me!"

"It seems," he told Viva, that these matters are governed by an elaborate etiquette. You'd think she was a duchess. I'd no idea that housekeeping was so dramatic."

"The black hunter is a figure of melodrama: I always said so," Viva declared. "I sometimes doubt if he has any existence when I'm not in liquor."

But Paolo had no doubt. On the marble steps of the tenement house, the hunter had been much in evidence of late. When Paolo saw him coming upstairs or down, he would step aside to let him pass and give him an automatic good day, which was never answered by anything but a snort. Often as he sat at work he would hear the nailed boots ringing on the flags.

The day after he had approached her, Cristina came knocking at Paolo's door. She looked younger, almost childish with excitement. The sunlight gave her skin a golden tinge as, if a frail, cold fire were burning inside it; it occurred to him that, as a girl, she must have been pretty.

"I can come," she said. "He says I can cook for you and bring you your food. Because there are two of you," she added with a solemn naïveté.

"*You* weren't afraid of us?" Paolo joked her.

"I wasn't afraid of you."

He hardly knew if this were a compliment. Viva, immensely flattered by the distinction, assured him that it wasn't.

"Why, even there," he said, "you see, you've got no chance." It set him at his old game of showing how easy and familiar he could be with women in Paolo's presence and proving how even Cristina must fall a victim to his charms. But this time Paolo had the laugh of him, for Cristina appeared to be quite unmoved by his graces, regarding them both with the same gentle composure whatever Viva said or did.

"There is something wrong with that woman," Viva declared, proceeding to medical details that Paolo couldn't understand. "I don't believe there's a drop of red blood in her body. Look at her arms, how white they are."

Viva often looked at Cristina's arms. Paolo looked at them himself, for their form was beautiful and under their golden lustre there glowed, though Viva hadn't noticed it, that frail, cold fire. He thought of them in terms of line and colour; but Viva's interest was not as purely medical as he pretended. Cristina's indifference challenged his reputation as a conqueror of women and, since his opportunities of

gallantry were now restricted, he settled down to a leisurely but careful siege.

Paolo knew nothing of this for Viva was clever enough to see that Cristina disliked attentions in public. In these days Paolo's painting so engrossed him that, when Viva returned to meals, he could not bring more than half of his intelligence to table; the other half remained suspended in the clouds of glory from which his work emerged. It came as a shock to him when he realised, a few weeks after their housekeeping began, that Viva and Cristina were not on speaking terms, that her eyes were always averted from Viva's, that she shrank from contact with him.

"What have you been doing to Cristina?" he asked when they were alone.

"To Cristina? Nothing," Viva answered irritably "I told you before that there was something wrong with her.' He became cryptic. "I have made—investigations. I was right.'

"It's evident," said Paolo, "that your investigations offended her.'

"The woman's a fool, a half-wit. She's not a woman. I wish she'd cover her arms up; they make me sick. What the devil are you laughing at now?"

"Better luck next time, Pietro!"

"Try it, and see for yourself. You're a queer pair, the two of you. You're just about her kind."

Whether this were true or not, the fact remained that she and Paolo got on well together. In a little while a change in Viva's duties at the hospital prevented him from returning to the house at midday, and Paolo took his lunch alone in his companion's room. Heaven knows what the black hunter would have thought of this arrangement. Probably Cristina didn't dare to tell him; but when she came gently tapping at Paolo's door and called him to lunch she was strangely soft and tremulous, as though she knew that she were running some desperate risk.

The transfigured Cristina of these moments had no relation to the woman who served them when Viva was present. Physically, even, she was different. When she was talking with Paolo, her sad mouth grew soft and younger, her body lost its rigidity, her brown eyes melted in tenderness; even her voice changed. She was like a leaden landscape suddenly smitten by dawn; her eyes like grey water when sunlight dances down on tawny pebbles. All in a moment, incredibly, Paolo saw her thus.

"My God, Cristina," he cried, "you're wonderful. I must paint you like that. Why didn't I see it before?"

Then colour, like that of a dying sun, swept over her · and when it had gone there was no beauty left She was sad and rigid; there was no light in her

"Why did you say that?" she answered dully, bitterly. "Do you want him to kill me?"

"Don't be ridiculous." he told her. "He's just a man like any other man, this Goliath of yours. I'm not afraid of him. Tell him that David presents his compliments and may he have the honour of painting the lady in the basement in return for a portrait of his elegant self? In hunting-costume. No extra charge for the sack."

"Oh, don't, don't! she cried passionately "Don't joke about it. You're talking like a fool. You know nothing about him."

"Well, that's your fault, Cristina. Why don't you enlighten me?"

"I can't." She put her hands to her eyes. "Why have you ruined everything like this?"

Paolo had never been forced to deal with such a situation. The contrast between his own mild amusement and her sudden passionateness impressed him with the duty of consoling her.

"You needn't be shocked like that. You're mistaken. I've no intention of making love to you."

He rose from his chair; but when he approached her she took a violent fright and hurried from the room.

¶

"WHAT have you been doing to Cristina?" Viva asked him that evening. "I never saw such a sullen pair of eyes."

"Not sullen," Paolo said; "and yet it's true that you can't tell what's behind them. They're like the eyes of a strange dog that stares at you from a distance. You can't invent thoughts for them or guess whether they're looking at you with shyness or hatred or just bored indifference."

"And as far as I'm concerned,' said Viva, "I've no wish to."

It was only by degrees that her confidence

returned; and now Paolo knew better than to talk of portraits or of anything else that might trail the shadow of the black huntsman across their sky. Little by little they slipped back into their old mode of life. It even seemed as if Cristina were anxious to make amends for her unreasonable fit of panic. She mended his worn clothes; she washed and ironed for him. Even his chaotic studio showed traces of her unobtrusive care. When April came she put roses at his bedside, and once a snowy branch of bitter cherry blossom. He found them there, miraculously, when he returned from breakfast in Viva's room, and scolded her mildly for her extravagance.

"They're nothing," she said, and yet they make country people like us feel at home."

"I don't see any mention of them in the bill," he said. "You've no idea, Cristina, how rich I am. I want to pay for them."

But this she obstinately refused. "You don't realise," she said, "that they give me more joy than you.

"You'll regret it," he said. "You're spoiling me. You're like a mother to me."

"Yes, like a mother," she happily agreed. "Tell me about your mother, Paolo."

He talked about Concetta and the life of Pogerola. She listened, standing, with grave eyes, so quietly that he began to think he was boring her

"No, no," she said. "Go on telling me. It's like a dream to me, a good dream. I never had a mother myself." He pressed her to explain. "I was brought up in an orphanage in Venezia," she told him. "There were three hundred of us, all in little grey frocks and straw hats The sisters were very kind to us, but that, of course, isn't the same thing. Go on, I like to listen."

"But when you left the orphanage?" he said.

"I was sixteen. I came with a family to Naples. The woman died " She stopped suddenly.

"And then?"

"That's all," she said dully.

"My dear Cristina, you stop just when it's getting interesting."

"Interesting?" she answered bitterly. "No, that's the end of my story."

Paolo stood smiling at her. "I suppose," he began

"You can suppose nothing," she interrupted. "Paolo, don't pester me, and don't smile like that. It's no use. I shall never tell you. Never, never, never!"

She retreated to the doorway, a grave and tragic figure. All the sweetness and youth had gone out of her, all their strange intimacy had vanished. She fled from him, precipitately.

Yet, even when she was gone, Cristina's image troubled him. By slow degrees, imperceptibly, her presence had penetrated and established itself in his solitary life. Without his knowing it her forethought and her attentions had become essential to him. Her silence was a necessary background for his spoken thoughts, thoughts that he could not speak to Viva or any other soul in Naples. He even spoke to her about his work, explaining his pictures to her, expounded his triumphs, and excused his failures In her company he could think aloud. It was enough for her that Paolo should be happy.

One day when he carried his week's work to the shop in the Toledo a surprise awaited him. The shopman, who had always welcomed Paolo, received him coldly.

"We don't want any more of your boxes," he told him. "We have made a large purchase of some others at a third of your price."

"But you commissioned five," Paolo said, "and here they are."

"No use to us," said the shopman. "We're overstocked already. You can see for yourself." He handed Paolo a sample from a heap displayed on the counter.

"But these are inferior to mine," Paolo assured him. "The work is rough, and designs banal, there's no imagination in them. Look, they are all the same"

"That may be so," said the shopman, "but customers don't notice any difference. They sell just as well, which is all that matters to me I am a shopkeeper, understand, not a patron of art If you can produce the same thing at our new price we might possibly consider it in a month's time."

Paolo stood there dumbfounded.

"Would you be kind enough to tell me," he said, "where these things come from?"

In his heart he suspected Kalisch.

The shopman swung round on his heel there was an avaricious light in his eyes

"Well, that is hardly business," he said, "but since you're an old client of ours I'll tell you. They come from the studio of Signor Gennaro in this street. Possibly he

might employ you. You might even take the things you have there to him."

Then Paolo burst out laughing. This vengeance was poetic. He carried his boxes back to the *Vicolo de Angelis*. For a week he struck work, living on his capital which was little enough, for of late he had been extravagant, financing Viva as well as himself. At the end of that week he realised that this would never do. Once more he made a pilgrimage of humiliation to the shop in the Toledo. The shopman took his boxes at the new price and promised to buy more.

"I agree with you," he said, "that yours are better than Gennaro's, and occasionally a customer discriminates. Probably in a week or two, the price will go down again. Gennaro tells me that he is sending dozens of them to Rome and Florence, and the fuller the market the cheaper the article."

It seemed to Paolo as if circumstances were assembling to crush him from every side. All over Naples he tramped in search of cheaper parchment. And then, more devastating than the rise in prices, the actual supply of parchment suddenly failed.

"There's only one thing left for you," Viva mocked him. "You'll have to go and ask a favour of old Kalisch."

"I'll starve first!" Paolo flamed.

"Probably," said Viva. "And so, by the way, shall I. That is an unfortunate coincidence."

Strangely enough, Paolo had never troubled Cristina with his confidence. It was no business of hers; he was proud, and she could not help him, although, as he knew well enough, she could not fail to see the physical signs or feel the spiritual repercussions of his distress. And then, at last, he went out at night no longer. He was ashamed to show himself in the city for he had been forced to sell his clothes. She missed them, when she came to brush them in the morning and wondered what he had done with them; but his looks were so gloomy and savage, his temper so uncertain that she dared not speak.

Unable to bear the mystery of his strangeness any longer, she opened fire: "Paolo," she said, "I am tired of seeing you like this. It's becoming impossible. I speak to you: you don't answer; you won't even talk about your painting. I bring you food; I think all day about it: I might as well be feeding cattle for all the notice you take. If only you told me what has changed you I could bear it. Oh, Paolo, tell me, tell me!"

She spoke so rapidly and so surprisingly that he made a clumsy answer. "At any rate it's not anything to do with you."

Her face showed pain.

"No, no, I don't mean that, Cristina. I didn't mean to hurt you. I only mean that if I'm as you say there's nothing in it that need affect you or trouble you."

"How can I live here," she cried, "and not be affected? You, with your painting, Paolo, are so superior. You live in a world of your own and are so proud of it that you think you can trample on everybody's feelings. You don't even know when they're under your feet. That's why you're born to break people's hearts, you artists. It doesn't affect you; it doesn't interest you. It isn't that you're cruel: you're just blind."

In the fury of her emotion this woman was almost eloquent. A second transfiguration. She stood with head thrown back and hands clasped over her breast.

"My dear Cristina . . ." he stammered. She broke in eagerly.

"Tell me at once, Paolo," she said. "Is it a woman?"

"A woman? My dear Cristina . . ."

"I knew it. I knew it! That's Viva's fault. I know him too well . . . too well. He's driven you to it. How I hate him, the pig! It's lucky I haven't killed him. Who knows? There's still time . . ."

Paolo rose at once in his first friend's defence.

"Viva has nothing to do with it. You go so fast. Cristina, you look like a murderess."

"You make me feel like one." But her tone was quieter. "Tell me, Paolo, who is she?"

"For God's sake calm yourself. Of course there is no woman. I have no time for women. You might have known it. Why, you're the only woman I ever speak to."

"Is that true, Paolo?" she gasped. "Is it true? Oh, Paolo!" Her voice was pitiful in its entreaty, faltering into a dazed silence. "Yes, yes, I might have known," she went on calmly, almost resentfully. "Then tell me, please, why are you so mysterious?"

"Why, there's no mystery whatever," he told her. "I'm on the rocks, that's all. That's what a painter's life is said to be like, all ups and downs. And I'm not hardened to it. When I came here first I had no money, as you might have guessed. Then

things went well. An Austrian Jew in the Chiaia showed me how to make some. I became as rich as Crœsus."

"Crœsus?" she echoed blankly. "Ah yes, I know. Those funny boxes."

"They weren't as funny as all that," he said, "but that's beside the point. No boxes: no more money. There's your mystery!"

"But is that all?" she asked bewilderedly. "Oh Paolo, why didn't you tell me that and save me all this suffering? I have some money. A little . . . Please let me lend it to you. It's no good to me."

He shook his head. "That doesn't solve my trouble," he told her. "It goes deeper than that. You can't expect me to live on what I borrow from you. I've got to make it out of my brains. For the moment I'm done; but I shall find some way. You need have no fear of that."

"I want to understand," she said solemnly, "so please be patient with me. You mean that they won't buy your boxes any more? I called them funny, Paolo: but they are pretty boxes all the same."

"Thank you for the delayed compliment, Cristina." He bowed to her. "It is a matter of materials. There's no more parchment to be bought, except as ruinous prices, and so . . ."

"Parchment?" she interrupted. "What is parchment?"

It was in moments such as this that her simplicity astonished him; but her seriousness checked his smile.

"The skins with which I used to cover them," he explained. "Leaves out of old missals. Surely you've noticed them."

"Oh, those?" she cried. "And is that all? Paolo, Paolo, why didn't you tell me before? And if you had these—parchments, would you be happy again?"

She was so eager, so excited, that he couldn't think what she was driving at. "Oh, Paolo, wait one moment, only one moment," she said. "Oh, my poor child! If only I'd known!"

In a moment she was gone. Paolo, mystified, followed her to the door. The landing was empty, and when he peered over the iron balusters she was not to be seen. Where she had vanished to he couldn't imagine. Suddenly he heard the slam of a door on the landing above and raised his head. She was coming down the attic stairs with her face on flame, with joy and laughter in her eyes. She came breathlessly to his side.

"Not here. . . . Oh, Paolo, I'm so happy, so frightened!" she laughed.

He followed her into Viva's room.

"The door," she whispered. "Close it. I've told you, I'm frightened."

He obeyed her and, when he returned, she took from her folded apron two sheets of parchment and thrust them into his hands.

"Is this the kind you want?" she asked him eagerly.

He stared at them in amazement. Two pages of missal: rich and lovely workmanship of the seventeenth century, as fresh as though that moment they had left the illuminator's hands. Only once or twice in all his searchings had he lighted on such virginity. For the moment he could think of nothing but the maker's skill and grace. He handled them reverently.

"Ah, they're no good," she whispered, "and I hoped so much that they would please you. I'm sorry, Paolo. I thought..." Her voice faltered.

"Cristina, what are you saying?" he cried. "No good? But they're marvellous—marvellous. Too good, if you like!"

"Oh, Paolo!" was all that she could say. The swift alternations of fear and hope and disappointment had been too much for her. She smiled, but tears ran down her cheeks. Laughing and crying at once, she stretched out her hands to him in a gesture that was like that of a bewildered child. "Oh, Paolo," she said, "I'm so frightened, so glad—so glad! I'd do anything, anything to make you happy. And now you are happy? Tell me, Paolo——?"

Laughing, he took her hands in his. She leaned towards him with eyes half-closed. His fingers slipped upwards over her white forearms. They were warm and incredibly soft. The contact moved him to a strange giddiness. His blood sang in his ears. Her hot cheek lay upon his own. Languidly she turned her head. Her lips were on his. She shuddered. Like a living tree she shuddered, and was still.

Only for one moment. In the next his whirling brain recovered itself. It awoke to a consciousness, sudden, and piercingly clear, of his surroundings.

Once more the blood rushed up into his head. This time it carried with it a flood of amazement and of shame that turned

his body into ice. His fingers relaxed their grip of Cristina's shoulders. Through his mind there blew a chilly gust of fear, of distaste, of wonder at the demon that had taken brief possession of himself. Was she, then, so insensitive as to imagine that he loved her? If this were so, her insensitiveness became a claim for pity. She opened eyes that were soft, appealing; she smiled out of the richness of this false content; and pity stronger than any emotion that had preceded it, save in the moment of that mad possession, swept his mind bare of any other emotion.

"I am so happy, Paolo, so happy," she said. She laughed softly, like a child. "I don't know what happened to us," she said. "I don't think I knew what I was doing. I was frightened—about your parchments, I mean—and when you were silent for so long I thought that they were no good, after all. You see? And then when I knew that it was only your funny ways—why, then I was so happy that I thought my heart would break. It would have broken itself, Paolo, if we hadn't kissed. And now—oh, now I feel as if all my old life had been blotted out, as if I were a little girl again—you know?—in the days when we used to go out picking flowers on the hills in springtime. Yes, just like waking up in the morning in spring.

"You're a worker of miracles, Cristina. A witch. How did you do it? Tell me, where did you find them?"

She shook her head pitifully. "Paolo, don't ask me, my dear one. I stole them."

"But where? And how . . . and from whom? You must tell me. Make me your confessor."

"No, no, I daren't," she murmured. All the old fear came back into her eyes. He had seen that look before and knew its origin. "I think I was mad. Just mad with happiness. Now I daren't think of it. Oh, Paolo, dear, don't ask me——"

"But you've told me already," he cried triumphantly. "Your master, the black hunter! But how in the name of goodness——"

"Don't, don't!" she whispered. "Don't speak of him! You of all people on earth."

Her face grew blank and crushed with misery; there was no happiness, no possibility of happiness in it; her eyes communicated fear so desperate that Paolo himself became afraid for her. He spoke solemnly.

"Cristina, you have no right to run a risk for my sake. If these parchments are his, it's better that you should return them. There's an indignity. How can I profit by things that are stolen? If I might pay for them, it would be different."

"No, no!" she cried, with a sudden renewal of passion. "Of course you can't pay for them. How could I even speak of it? Besides, they are mine—mine. I have a right to them. Nobody can dispute my right. Haven't I paid a hundred thousand times? Take them, take them, Paolo! They are nothing and there are many more."

"Then our friend is a collector?"

"A collector? No."

"And in this house—— ?" he continued.

"Oh, Paolo, don't torment me! Be merciful, be kind!" She stood before him, entreating, with clasped hands. "Now I must go," she said. "Already I've stayed here too long. This is the time when he often comes. Good-bye. . . ."

But still she did not go. She waited. And Paolo, a little bewildered and cold, knew what she was waiting for. Of himself he could not give it, for the moment of strange madness had passed irrevocably. Not even as a duty, as the payment of a debt incurred, could he move to meet her. An obstinate inhibition froze his body that the pleading in her eyes could not melt. Not even pity. He felt himself hard and unresponsive as steel and feared that she must be aware of his hardness. Swiftly, softly, she came again to his arms and, for one moment, pressed her lips to his unwilling cheek. It was as if her own warmth sufficed for both, as if she did not realise the rebellion that was in him. Sick with the consciousness of his own baseness, he submitted to her embrace, thankful that she did not understand. They parted. One moment she stood at the doorway with rapture in her face.

"To-night," she said, "I shall reach heaven without need of stairs."

¶

SHE went. For all the rest of his life Paolo Ricci was to remember that parting; the sun-drenched silence of the little room; the figure of Cristina standing in the doorway with outstretched arms and, on her features, the transfiguration of a beatified saint. "To-night I shall reach heaven without the need of stairs," she had said.

" She loves me," he thought; and the sudden magnificence of his unconscious achievement made his head spin; without word or deed he had accomplished the conquest in which the skilful and sedulous Viva had failed. " But I do not love her," he told himself. " She is older, much older than the woman that I should love. She is not beautiful, as I imagine beauty."

All through the burning afternoon he struggled with his problems, but could not solve them. The south wind seemed to have borne a heavy stupor of middle Africa upon its wings; the gulf was like a cauldron of molten lead: there was no power of life or thought beneath the sky's oppression.

" When she comes here again," he thought, " I will make my position clear to her. It's better to do so at once than that we should live another moment in such an atmosphere of falseness."

But Cristina did not come, and as the day wore on Paolo's first scruples seemed to lose their strength. For himself, he had acted honourably. He had offered to pay for any that she brought him. That, she said, was impossible; his honourable offer had been refused. There were so many of them, she said, where these came from, that she could have brought him a dozen more without the least danger of their being missed. Where, where? And, in the name of heaven, why? That was a question which some queer taboo prevented her from answering and, though its pursuit fascinated and puzzled him, it was none of his business.

When Viva came in, tired and disgruntled, that evening, he found Paolo working in the imperfect light.

" I'm starved to death," he said, pitching his hat into a corner. " Nothing to eat since breakfast, and damned little then, and the cursed professor of surgery biting my head off all day. Hello—what's this? Cristo, Paolo, you don't say that the tide's turned? You've stolen some parchment? "

Paolo laughed out loud. Stolen. That was the word, though Viva didn't know it.

" Two sheets," he answered. " We'll have a good meal to-morrow, my son."

" To-morrow be damned! " cried Viva. " I'll find credit somewhere. This calls for a bottle of wine. Give me my hat."

Paolo tossed it to him. It was jolly to see the way in which Viva's chilled spirits expanded like mercury in a finely adjusted clinical thermometer. When he had gone on his foraging errand, Paolo lit two lavish candles and set himself to a feverish recovery of lost time. So absorbed was he that now there was no room in his mind for anything but the joy of swift achievement all coloured by the gentle glow of Viva's careless cheerfulness.

Within an hour Viva returned, his pockets triumphantly bulging and a bottle of wine in either hand. " I've told that slut, Cristina," he panted, " and in ten minutes the maccheroni will be ready. I let her know that your luck had turned, Paolo. You'd have thought that, being such a special friend of yours, she'd have been pleased to hear the news—the grocer was, I can assure you!—but not a bit of it. Sullen as a dog, she was. That woman has no life or feeling in her; no wonder she's never found a husband! "

They dined. The meal was coloured by Viva's boisterous humour. Cristina waited on them. She was as silent—as sullen, he would have called it—as ever. Only, out of her silence, her presence spoke to Paolo more clearly, more poignantly than words. All through the meal he was conscious of her warm immanence, and, as the unaccustomed food and wine inflamed him, there followed a sense of triumph in the secret which Viva, for all his smartness, couldn't penetrate, of pride in the assertion of his new-born manhood. This feast was his and Cristina's, Viva was their guest, their dupe. Once, when Pietro wasn't looking, he raised his glass to her. Out of the darkness she answered him with no word, not even a smile, but with a look of gentleness that gave her, suddenly, all the beauty with which his imagination had dowered her in her absence. When, late that night, Paolo tumbled into bed, his body and mind still quivered in a strange, exalted confusion.

With daylight came the inevitable reaction. Before he had finished dressing, Cristina knocked discreetly on his door to tell him that breakfast was ready. When he entered Viva's room she was standing, waiting for him. At the sight of her, in the clear morning light, her figure clothed in the black overall that he knew so well, his damped spirits suffered a sudden shock. This was the Cristina with whom for months he had been familiar, the awkward, silent woman of their first encounter, never, for one possible moment, the creature whose presence had thrilled

him, whose memory had inflamed his passion on the night before. A gust of wonder, almost of distaste, blew through him. He grew shy, ashamed, fearful lest his averted eyes should show her what he was feeling.

"You slept well, Paolo?" she said at last.

"Moderately well," he answered, afraid that any word of his might lead them into paths of danger.

"You drank too much Gragnano. I was watching you. With Viva it doesn't matter—he is more coarsely built and will go on drinking till he dies whenever he has the opportunity. But you, oh my Paolo, with you it is so different. I would have spoken to you if I had dared. But I am timid. You'll never know how curiously shy I felt: as if I had never set eyes on either of you before. So shy, so happy, so tender! Then, when I went to bed, I lay awake thinking about you, Paolo, hour after hour. I told you, didn't I, that I should sleep in heaven? This morning, somehow, it is different. I can't think why, for neither of us have changed."

Indeed it was different. It seemed monstrous to Paolo that he should be unmoved by her words; for there was nothing in them that did not speak of love, of gentleness, of goodness, of things that he could not accept from her. He could not accept them; but had he not already accepted and used the parchments that she had given him? Could he take one without the other? And was not her generosity more lawful in the first place than in the second? The damnable falsity of his whole position weighed on him and made him dumb. He could not thank her; he could not love her; and yet, without the parchments, the fruits of her devoted dishonesty he could not hope to live, nor, what was infinitely more, to fulfil the passionate destiny of his art. For more than a fortnight he had not touched a canvas; the thwarted lust of creation burned in his fingers. Here, in Cristina's unguessed kindness, lay the power to assuage that passion. A single word of tenderness from him would make life and art together possible and fill her whole life with the joy of service and sacrifice.

He could not speak it. She left him to finish his bitter meal in silence; he could hear her moving in his room next door, singing softly to herself as she reduced the night's disorder and set his table ready for the morning's work. And Paolo sat on stubbornly over his unfinished breakfast, half hoping that, when she had finished, she would have sufficient tact and sensitiveness to leave him alone. He heard the door of his room close behind her. A silence followed, and he breathed relief. The suspense was over. His hopes had overrun themselves. Suddenly, stealthily, Cristina was standing at his elbow. Her voice was low and breathless as she leaned close to him: "Look, Paolo," she said. "Look, I have brought you these. Tell me quickly if they are right. If they won't do I'll change them. I'm so ignorant that I don't really know."

She thrust before his eyes a sheaf of seven pages, enough to keep him busy for a week. The sheets, in their ivory innocence, tempted his greedy eyes.

"Cristina!" he stammered. "Oh, why have you done this?"

"Because I love you, Paolo," she laughed softly. "Isn't that a good reason?"

"No, no. How can you say so? I can't take them. You know that they're not yours to give."

"But haven't I told you, my dear one, that there are hundreds . . . thousands? If I brought you as many as these every day they'd never be missed. Nobody will ever know, my darling."

He laughed at her innocent guile. "But we are honest people, Cristina, which makes it impossible. Surely you can see that?"

For a moment her conviction wavered, but only for a moment. "In love," she declared magnificently, "these things do not count. They're nothing compared with what I'd be ready to do for you. Besides, what is it? A few francs more or less!"

"In principle . . ." he began.

"Ah, principles! That word's beyond me. But look," she cried, as in the flush of a new and important discovery, "if there is any wrong, it's I who have done it, not you. So that you, you see, are absolved. Isn't that splendid? Now you can put your dear conscience to sleep. Now you can take them, Paolo?"

He struggled to find words of refusal that would not wound her too deeply. Cristina, seeing him waver, swiftly changed the angle of her attack.

"I see that you want to make a fool of me," she said, with a sudden, bitter intensity. "Ah, Paolo, how cold, how calculating, how inhuman you are! Do you think I can't read you? Well, admit

the truth, the last word of it: that you despise me as a fool who has set out to catch you with a bait that she's stolen. Isn't that what you're thinking? It is. I know it. That's why you don't dare to answer me. Oh, but what lies . . . how cruel, how unjust you are! Now you shall hear the truth. I'll tell you; even if you don't believe me you shall listen. From the beginning . . ."

He would have protested his innocence; for, whatever else there may have been in his mind, there was no scorn in it—nothing, indeed, but an instinctive misgiving; but as he opened his lips the flood burst over him.

"From the beginning—oh, you know nothing of what goes to make a life, even a life like mine. I've told you about my childhood, a word here and there. Up in the mountains of Venetia. We were country people, like yourself. In winter there was snow: mile after mile of it, so white, so sparkling; and air that made your body tingle. But that is a dream. What I remember is spring. The flowers. Oh, Paolo, if you had seen them! Such a big greenness, and the bees making honey, and baby swallows chirruping and sitting huddled up together under the eaves—long, sloping eaves of wooden clatters such as you've never seen. My father would never shoot the swallows. Mother told me so. There was a baby wolf in a cage. . . . And that's all I remember of him.

"The sisters never talked of any father but God, in the orphanage at Padua. Many of the children hadn't ever had a father; I suppose that was the reason. I think I must have been very miserable there at first, just like a lost lamb, and the other children so cunning and so much at home; but it's so long ago that I almost forget about it. Only the cold I remember. Blue, stony cold. We used to rub our hands in the morning to thaw them before we could feel the beads of our rosaries. Oh, how the needles used to slip through our shiny fingers! Our little souls and bodies were all frozen up together, so that we couldn't think; only sew and sew and sew. . . ." Her voice slowed and softened into the monotony of her memories. She was silent.

"Why am I talking about Padua?" she went on suddenly. "That's all so long ago that it means nothing. A woman came to the orphanage to look for a servant. I was stronger than the other girls. I was always strong, even at thirteen. I suppose that was why she chose me. She ran her eyes over me like a cabman buying a horse. She was a fat, sad woman, with no life in her. She looked so cold and cruel that I was frightened to death of her; though, really, I needn't have been scared at all. You see, she had just lost her husband and come up to Padua from Naples because her sister lived there. She took me away from the orphanage.

"We travelled all night in the train. She slept with her mouth open and snored, but I could do nothing but cry and cry and cry, very quietly, so that the other people in the carriage shouldn't hear me. Think of it! I'd never been in a train before; I was half-dead with fright and loneliness. If the train had run off the lines in the night, I shouldn't have minded.

"Afterwards, I knew that if she had heard me crying she would have comforted me. Her own unhappiness made her blind to everything else. You see, she was going back to Naples—to Torre, rather—where she'd been happily married for twenty years, coming back to the emptiness of the house where they'd lived together, she and Gargiulo—that was her husband's name—with no company but the wretched, strange little orphan she'd picked up in Padua. Her own life was finished, poor dear, and why should she think of me?

"But she did, Paolo; she did, later on. For three years that woman was like a mother to me. Partly, I suppose, because I was a Northerner like herself, and her own daughter, Caterina, a Neapolitan, like the husband. It was a quiet life at Torre; but the sun used to shine as I don't believe it ever shone in Padua, and we had plenty to eat. In spring, when the peach trees were in blossom, we used to take a walk in the evening, up toward Vesuvius.

"And on summer nights, Paolo, there were fireworks; the people at Torre are known to be very religious. One *festa* after another! We had a balcony that looked out over the gulf; you could sit and see the rockets and fireballs bursting all along the shore, and on these evenings of *festa* old friends of the Signora's husband—he'd been a haulier—used to drop in and drink a bottle of wine with her and watch the fires. That used to brighten her up like nothing else, dear soul. The men knew that she understood them, and respected

Gargiulo's memory. I think she could easily have married again if she'd fancied it. 'But then,' she used to say, 'I've had my life. This is the day of the young ones, Cristina.'

"The men were very kind to me, too. You see, Signora Gargiulo treated me like a daughter. She knew that young girls like flattery, and encouraged them. I was young and pretty in those days, Paolo, and red girls like me were rare in Naples. 'One of these days,' she used to say, 'before I'm gone, we shall have to marry you.' 'No, no, I shall never leave you,' I told her. Then she'd shake her head. 'Don't be so sure, my child,' she'd say. 'That is a matter of destiny.' Destiny. . . . *He* was one of the friends of her husband who used to come and visit her. You know who I mean?" She paused, a little anxiously. Paolo assented.

"I liked him, too," she went on. "I must tell the truth, Paolo; I liked him as well as any of them. Ten years ago. . . . You see, he was much younger: younger than any of them; thirty-five, perhaps. He was dark and strong and manly; he looked you straight in the eyes, and his eyes held you. He looked like a fighter. And he did fight; for me, too.

"He used to take my part against the old woman's daughter. Caterina, her name was. Oh, but I've told you that before! Caterina was jealous of the way in which her mother treated me; she couldn't bear to see me used as anything but a servant. And she was jealous, also, because *he* looked at me, although she had a husband of her own in Castellamare. He knew that, too. He has eyes in the back of his head. I think he had a fancy for Caterina as well. Anyone would do, as long as it was a woman; and just to make her wild he'd play me off against her, like the devil he is.

"And I, little fool," she continued, bitterly, "was so flattered that I didn't realise why Caterina hated me! But, when her mother died, you should have seen! It came quite suddenly—the end, I mean. Of course, her breath had been short for a long time. They said it was the fluid that had reached her heart. I was with her when she went, all alone with her. I'd never seen death before—nor since, thank God! When mother died I was too little. I ran out into the street, crying; they must have thought I was mad. I'd only been with her three years, but she was everything to me, all I had in the world. Then I sat in the corner of the room and cried. The women came to lay her out; but Caterina was there before them. Can you believe it? Even when that poor thing was lying dead, Caterina was looking for money under the mattress.

"She'd taken no notice of me; but, when I saw that, I could bear it no longer. I flew at her in a fury. 'How dare you, how dare you?' I cried. 'You shall not touch her!' Terrible, in that dark room, with her own mother lying dead, and Caterina, her mouth twisted, her eyes blazing with hatred and avarice. I caught her arm and tried to drag her away; but she was stronger than me. She struggled like a cat and forced me, threw me, into the corner of the room.

"'And you,' she said, 'what is it to do with you? At last she is out of your clutches! How do I know you haven't stolen already? You with your creeping ways and your thieving blood! I'll have you stripped, if you are not careful, to see what you've got on you, as soon as the carabinieri come. You came into this house like a beggar, and a beggar you shall leave it—trust me for that. Why, even your clothes are not your own! What's this you're wearing?'

"She came down on me like a hawk and tore my apron from me. It wasn't really mine, but her mother had let me wear it in the afternoon. 'Now go,' she said. 'Out of this house at once, and let me never see your ugly white face again!' She pulled me on to my feet; she was as strong as a man. She pushed me to the door. I fell on the stone stairs. First death, and then this. . . . I was as helpless as an idiot. Then she began to kick me—I think she must have been mad with hatred. She was screaming at the top of her voice and the neighbours stood and stared. Not a friend, not a single friend, and Caterina shouting insults after me. They made way for me to pass. 'Where can I go?' I said. 'I've nowhere to go. Oh, let me stay here a little!' Caterina came flying down the stairs behind me. The people were laughing at both of us, but she took no notice. 'Out of the house,' she shouted, 'out of it!'

"I heard someone saying it was a shame; but nobody raised a finger for me. Cowards! They were all cowards, like the people are here. Caterina came up close behind me

with her claws lifted, and I ran out into the street. The light was blinding, after the dark house, and my eyes dazzled with tears. I ran along the street, crying aloud; but people only turned and stared at me. Why, you could be murdered in the streets of Torre and no one turn a hair! I ran and ran; I didn't know where I was going. Didn't care. . . .

"Then somebody caught me by the arm. It was he. You know. . . . I must have looked like a mad dog running through the street. 'Why, Cristina, little Cristina,' he said, 'what's the matter with you?'

"'She's dead, she's dead; the mistress is dead!' I told him. I could think of nothing else. 'She's dead, and Caterina has thrown me out of the house.' He let go of my arm and crossed himself. 'Dead? My God!' he said. 'And where are you going?' I told him what Caterina had said. He laughed: 'The jealous devil! That's Caterina all over,' he said. 'But where are you going, seriously, Cristina?'

"I told him that I'd spoken the truth, that I didn't know.

"'Well, then, I'll tell you,' said he. 'You're coming with me. Do you understand?'

"I didn't understand. At that moment I think I'd have gone with anyone who had spoken a kind word to me. He called a cab and helped me into it and told the driver where to go. I suppose we must have driven for miles and miles, but I remember nothing: only the crying, that nothing could stop, and the smell of his cigar, and the sun . . . the blinding sun. We drove through the *dazio* and into Naples. He paid the cabman in the *piazza* outside here. We walked down the Vicolo, to the door of this house. I've been here ever since."

Again she was silent:

"Ten years, Paolo. I was sixteen . . .

"At first he was very kind to me. Not even the devil could have been anything else to such a miserable creature. I was all alone in the house. He'd bought it cheap—you see his father had died just before, and he was very rich—partly to let in tenements, and partly as a warehouse. He kept the ground floor for himself and for me. And I was fortunate, in a way. If it hadn't been for him heaven knows what would have happened to me. He used to treat me . . . how shall I say? . . . rather like the little wolf that my father kept in a cage: a little wild animal, just there to play with in spare moments. But always the cage . . .

"And of course he made love to me, Paolo. I was a little shy and scared of him; but that, too, was only part of his play. He wouldn't let me talk to any of the tenants—oh, yes, he could be frightening at times—so that he was the only living person that I ever saw. It was amusing, yes, and exciting to have a house of my own to look after. I took a strange pride in it; working, working away to forget my unhappiness. It was so old and dirty. You can have no idea how I scrubbed and scrubbed! He used to laugh at me and tease me too, pretending to find corners that I'd neglected. But sometimes he was angry with me, impatient to see me working. And sometimes he'd joke with me about other things, though I didn't know he was joking. 'When are you going to marry me, Cristina?' he'd say. Not that he ever intended to marry me; I didn't know till long after that he had a wife already in his other house. If he had really wanted me to marry him in those days I'd have done so. I supposed that we should be married later. I thought of it quite seriously, just waiting for him to speak the word. And then . . ."

She stopped dead on the word. "Paolo, don't look at me like that, or I can't tell you. You don't help me. Not a single word! You're like a stone."

He couldn't even help himself, poor lad. "I wasn't looking at you, Cristina," was all that he could stammer.

"Oh, yes, you were," she cried; "but no matter. Whether you like it or no, you've got to hear."

(*To be continued in next month's* ARGOSY.)

# The Creative Impulse

*Of a Dutch sea-captain and his "landsturm"*

**By ALFRED NOYES**

CAPTAIN JULIUS VANDERMEER had undoubtedly made a pile of money. A Dutch sea-captain, who was the chief owner of his vessel during the first two years of the war, was a lucky dog. A couple of voyages might bring him more than he could hope to make in half-a-century of peace. If he were lucky enough to make forty or fifty successful voyages across the Atlantic, he could do exactly what Captain Vandermeer had done—retire from the sea, invest his money, look for a handsome young wife, and expect the remainder of his years to mellow around him like an orchard, dropping all the most pleasant fruits of life at his feet.

Best of all, despite the grey streaks in his bushy red beard, he was only half-way through the forties, and he knew how to enjoy himself.

He sat on the veranda of his broad, white bungalow under the foothills of the Sierra Madre, puffing at his big meerschaum pipe and explaining things to the lady whom he had just married.

"Long ago I settled it in my mind, Mimika," he said, "if ever I came to be rich there should only be one country in the world for me, and that should be Southern California. Look at it!"

He waved the stem of his pipe at the broad slopes below. As far as the eye could see, from the petals that dropped over the dainty little electric car before the porch to the distant horizon, they were one gorgeous pattern of fruit trees in blossom. Masses of white and pink bloom surged like foam against the veranda, and the soft wind blowing across that odorous wilderness was like the whisper of wings at sunset in Eden. Behind the windows of the dining-room a Chinese man-servant glided to and fro like a blue shadow.

"Man lives by contrast, Mimika," Vandermeer continued. "For a quarter of a century salt water was all my world. Now I have chosen seas of peach blossom, and no danger of shipwreck, eh? Ah, but it smells fine, Mimika, fine! When I saw my fortune coming I asked a friend in New York what was the place out of all the world where a man might live most happily, most healthily, in the most beautiful climate, to the age of ninety, or even to the age of a hundred, enjoying himself also, and what do you think he said? He told me a little story. He said: 'Yesterday I was at a funeral in Boston. The minister asked if anyone present would like to say a few words about the deceased. There was a silence. At last a man rose up and said: "I am a stranger here, and I'm sorry to say I never knew the deceased, but I should like to say a few words about Southern California."' At once I knew that my friend was right. I remembered San Diego when I was a boy, and the roses tumbling at my feet on Christmas Day. I remembered the women, Mimika, and the cantaloup melons, cut in halves, with the ice melting in their lovely yellow hearts; and as soon as the money was in the bank I took the Sunset Limited to the City of the Angels, Los Angeles—what a name, heh? In three weeks I had found my ranch, with its beautiful bungalow, waiting like a palace for its queen. In six months I had found the queen Mimika, heh?"

Mimika rose from her rocking-chair, remarking: "Now listen, Julius." This did not mean that she had anything of great importance to say. But she had a trick, which Vandermeer found fascinating, of prefacing most of her remarks with the command to listen. "Listen, Julius. You won't come down with me to meet Roy?" she said.

"No, Mimika, no. The little sister will have much to tell her brother when she sees him for the first time after—how long has he been in Europe, two years?—and she will have to tell him all about her honeymoon, heh?"

He pinched her ear playfully as she stooped to kiss him.

"I guess Roy will open his eyes when he sees my electric," she said.

She went down to the car in a skipping walk, while Captain Vandermeer surveyed her with the eye of one who has found a prize. She was wearing a Panama hat, a sweater of emerald green, and a very short, yellow skirt that fluttered round her yellow silk stockings like the petals of a Californian poppy. This was not altogether out of keeping with the blaze of the landscape, but her high-heeled white shoes prevented her from walking gracefully, and this was really a pity, for she could dance like a wave of the sea if she chose. Sadder still, her nose was white with powder, and her lips looked as if she had been eating damson jam. This also was a pity, because in its natural state her face was pretty as a wild flower.

Captain Vandermeer sat blowing rings of blue smoke between the roses for a minute or two longer. Then he entered the bungalow and went to a room at the back of the house which he had reserved as his own den. It was a very bare room at present, chiefly furnished by the neat little safe which he now proceeded to unlock.

He drew out a bundle of papers, and he examined them with loving care. There were American railroad bonds to the value of fifty thousand dollars; some Liberty Loan bonds to the value of fifty thousand more; twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of Anglo-French bonds; and the same amount of the City of Paris, risky enough if the Germans were going to break through, but he did not think they were, and they yielded over ten per cent. It was very wonderful, he thought, and he replaced them like a man saying good-night to his child.

Then he drew out a chamois-leather bag and poured the glittering contents into his left palm. He was a very wise man in his generation.

"You never know," he muttered, "you never know what will happen in these days to bonds. These are, perhaps, the best investment of all. These are the reserves of my little army. It was a good idea to keep them. Besides, you can put them in your pocket, and go where you wish at a moment's notice. It is not possible always to get money at once for bonds."

His face glowed with satisfaction as he replaced the bag in the safe and locked it.

On the way up to the ranch from the railway station Mimika had been chattering hard to her brother; but he noticed certain changes in her appearance with a feeling akin to remorse. He was not at all sure that she was really happy, despite her apparent enthusiasm over what she called the "generosity" of Julius. He wished that his mother had delayed things till he had returned from Europe, and he could not help wondering how far his failure to send home more than two-thirds of his own scanty income as a newspaper correspondent had contributed to the haste of this marriage. He had not been able to learn much about it. His mother was a vague widow, who—like so many widows—regarded marriage with a kind of ghostly detachment and a more than maidenly innocence. She was devoted to Mimika, but quite ready, he feared, to sacrifice Mimika to himself. Roy himself had not had too easy a time in the last few years.

He was one of those not uncommon Americans who combine an extraordinary knowledge of the world with the unworldliness—and sometimes the gullibility—of an Eastern sage. He knew more about the cathedrals of England than almost any Englishman; more about the châteaux of France than most Frenchmen. He could have dictated an encyclopædia of useful knowledge about Italy and Egypt. He had been a war correspondent in four quarters of the globe, and he had acquired a sense of the larger movements in politics that gave his opinions an unusual interest. He flew over the big guns of international affairs like a man in an aeroplane, and though his European hearers might not always like his signals they usually felt that he saw beyond their horizon.

His ambition, however, was to do creative work, and he had not yet succeeded. He marvelled how some men without expending a tithe of his energy had produced a shelf of books while he was still taking his notes. He never seemed to have the time for creation, and whenever he approached any original work he gravitated toward the method of the newspaper correspondent. He wondered sometimes whether this was due to a lack of what he called "the creative impulse." One of the things to which he had been looking forward on this visit was the opportunity that it would give him of obtaining some first-hand

material from a real live sea-captain. Yet he was not sure whether he would ever be able to transmute it into an original book.

His boyish smile was in somewhat pathetic contrast with his gold-spectacled and curiously dreamy, yet overstrained eyes, which sometimes gave his face in repose the expression of a youthful Buddha. His frequent abrupt changes between a violently active and an almost completely sedentary life had not been good for him physically, and he was subject to fits of depression, relieved by fits of extreme optimism.

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IF only Mimika were happy he was going to feel very optimistic about the material that Vandermeer could give him for the book he was contemplating. Indeed, already he could not help sharing a little in her enthusiasm over her electric.

"And listen, Roy: we've got a marble swimming-pool in the garden, all surrounded with heliotropes," she concluded, almost breathless, as they rolled up the long aisle of palms and pepper trees.

"Is that so?" said Roy. "And you love him, Mimika?"

"He's a dear," said Mimika. "And, of course——" She was going to add that Captain Vandermeer would do a great deal for Roy, but she had misgivings, and checked herself.

She had almost broached the subject to her lord this morning, and she had checked herself then, too, feeling instinctively that Vandermeer had grown rich too recently for him to help anyone but himself just at present.

The introduction of brother to husband went off very well indeed. Vandermeer was so hearty, and he held Roy's hand so affectionately, that Mimika ventured to approach the subject again when they were getting ready for dinner.

"And listen, Julius: you'll be able to help Roy just a little, too, won't you?" she said, putting her hands up to her hair before the mirror in her bedroom.

"What do you mean, Mimika, by 'help'?" Vandermeer's voice rolled in a very unsatisfactory way from the adjoining room.

"Oh, of course, there's only one kind of help Roy would accept," she replied hastily. "He's going to write something about the sea, and he thinks you might give him some hints."

"Why, certainly, Mimika. They say there's a book in every man's life." The voice was thoroughly hearty again now. "In mine, I should say there would be a hundred books. I will tell him some splendid things."

Even more jovial was the mood of Julius Vandermeer that evening after dinner, and he expanded his rosy views of the future to his brother-in-law over their cigars and a steaming rum-punch, flavoured with lemon, which was his own invention for coping with the cold of a California night. He called it his "internal smudge-pot."

"And now, Roy," he said at last, "I hope your own affairs go well. It is a great thing, the gift of expression. I wish I had it. Ah, what books I could write! The things I have seen, things you will never find in print!"

"That's precisely what I want to discuss with you, Julius. I have just signed a contract with the Copley-Willard Publishing Company to write them a serial dealing with the heroism of the merchant marine in war-time. I don't mind confessing that I told them a little about yourself—said you had no end of cracker-jack material I could use. The result was the best contract I've yet made with any publisher, so I owe that to you. The Star News Company was very well satisfied with my record as a correspondent, but I bungled the contract with them. If I can put this thing through, it means that I shan't be a poor relation much longer. Now, if you can only give me a good subject, and put me wise on the seamanship, and help me to get the local colour, the rest will be as easy as falling off a log. You must have had a good many experiences, for instance, with the submarines when you were crossing the Atlantic twice a week."

"Experiences? Why, yes, many experiences, but my good fortune comes—well, from my good fortune. I am like the happy nation. I have not had much history for these two years. But I have seen things—oh, yes, I have seen things—that were like what you call clues—clues to many strange tales."

"That's precisely what I want, Julius—a rattling good clue."

"Well, now let me think. There were some interesting things about those big merchant submarines which the Germans sent at one time across the Atlantic."

"Like the *Deutschland*, you mean?"

"Yes, and there were others never mentioned in the newspapers. One or two of them disappeared. Perhaps the British destroyed them. Nobody knows. But it was reported that one of them was carrying a million dollars' worth of diamonds to the United States. Think of that, Roy! A submarine full of diamonds! Doesn't that kindle your imagination?"

"Gee! I should say it would!" remarked Mimika, putting down the highly coloured magazine in which she had been studying the latest New York fashions.

"Depends what happened to it," said Roy.

"Come, then, I will tell you a little story," said Vandermeer, "but you must not mention my name about this one. How did I come to know it? Ah, perhaps by some strange accident I met the only man who could tell the truth about it. Perhaps I was able to do him some small service. In any case, that is a different matter. This story must be your own, Roy. It shall come from what you call your creative impulse."

Mimika plumped down on a cushion at her lord's feet to listen. He patted her shoulder affectionately with his big left paw, which showed up in a somewhat startling contrast, with its rough skin and long red hairs, against that smooth whiteness. With his right hand he filled himself the third glass of rum punch which he had taken that evening. He smacked his lips between two sips.

"Help yourself, Roy," he said, "and take another cigar. Yes, I will tell you. Take a sip, Mimika. That is good, heh? Now I shall need no more sugar.

"Well, Roy, just imagine. This big merchant-submarine leaves Hamburg loaded with diamonds! A million dollars' worth of diamonds, all going to the United States, because it is necessary that Germany shall pay some of her bills. There is a crew of only twenty men, because they need them for the U-boats. All of these men are sulky, rebellious. They have been forced to do this work against their will. They were happy on their ships in the Kiel Canal, except that there is always the chance of being picked for submarine duty. When they are lined up for that, ah, it is like waiting to be named for the guillotine in the Reign of Terror! They have courage, but their hands shake, their lips are blue, and their hearts are sick. It is the death sentence. Either this week, or the next, or the next, they will be missing. Certainly in eight weeks their places must be filled again; they are just fishes' food. Picture, then, first, the choosing of these men. There is your first chapter, heh?

"Now for the second. You must picture the captain. He is the most rebellious of all, for his life has been spared longer than most, but his life on the submarine is a living death. He is a good sailor, yes, in any surface vessel; but, in the first place, the submarine makes him sick at the stomach, the smells, the bad air, the joggle, joggle of the engine, the lights turned down to save the batteries. All that depresses him, and he has always the thought that if one leetle thing goes wrong he will die like a man buried alive in a big steel coffin with nineteen others, all fighting for breath. It is a nightmare—the only nightmare that ever frightened him."

Captain Vandermeer certainly had a vivid imagination, or else his own creative impulse, aided by frequent draughts of rum punch, was carrying him away, for his bulging blue eyes looked as if they would burst out of their canary-lashed lids.

"Moreover, this captain has been in a fighting submarine that shocked his nerves. He has grown used to scenes of death. He has come to the surface and seen many scores of men and women drowning, and he has watched them till he minds it no more than drowning flies. But twice he has found himself entangled in a steel net and escaped by a miracle. That is not so pleasant. When it was decided to send him to the United States on a merchant-submarine, what was his first thought? What would be yours, Roy, in that position?"

"A bedroom and bath at the Hotel Astor," replied Roy promptly.

"You follow the clue very well, my boy. You have a clever brother, Mimika. The first thought of the captain is this: If I can get safely through the ring of the enemy the rest of the voyage will not be so bad. I shall make most of it on the surface and I shall have a breathing spell in a great city outside the war. That will make the second chapter, heh? Now, what is his next thought, Mimika?"

"Why, listen. If I once got to New York I should want to stay there," replied Mimika, helping herself to a large piece of candy.

" Ah, what a clever sister you have, my dear Roy ! " said Vandermeer, and both his red-streaked paws descended approvingly on Mimika's white shoulders. " How beautifully we compose this tale together, heh ? But he has not yet reached America, and he has a submarine full of diamonds on his hands, also a crew of twenty men, also his orders as an officer in the German Navy.

" Well, let us suppose he has come safely through the ring of the enemy, after several nightmares. He runs on the surface almost always now, and he is losing his bad dreams for a time.

" One night he is on deck looking at the stars and thinking, who knows what thoughts, when the youngest engineer, a nice little fellow, a Bavarian, you might say, with flaxen hair and blue eyes, just as pretty as a girl, comes up to him. His face is as white and smooth as Mimika's shoulders —but there is no powder on it, heh ? And his blue eyes are frightened.

" ' Captain,' he says, ' I want to warn you. There is a plot among the men to kill you.'

" ' To kill me,' the captain says. ' Why should they wish to kill me, Otto ? '

" ' They've gone crazy about the diamonds. They say they have had enough of this life and they will never go back to Germany. They mean to take the diamonds and sell them a few at a time in America. Then they will live like princes. They think I'm joining them.'

" ' Is there nobody but yourself on my side ? ' says the captain.

" ' Nobody now,' says Otto.

" ' Very well, thank you, my boy. I will see that you are rewarded for this. When are they going to do it ? '

" ' When we are submerged and nearing the three-mile limit.'

" ' Thank you, Otto,' says the captain again.

" And there's your third chapter, and your fourth, too, Roy—a dramatic situation, heh ? "

¶

ROY appeared to think so and, on the strength of it, he filled Vandermeer's glass again. He was anxious to help the creative impulse.

" What follows ? " continued Vandermeer. " In your tales to-day you must have psychology. The captain is a clever man. What would you do in that position, Roy ? He cannot fight them all. I will tell you what he does. He is a diplomatist. He shapes his policy, standing there on the deck of the submarine, all alone, under the stars.

" The next evening he orders rum all round, just like this—good rum, from his own little cask, which he keeps for the sake of his stomach. It is a beautiful evening, a sea like oil, and the setting sun makes a road of gold to the shores of America. They are approaching the happy land. The men themselves are more cheerful, and, like a good diplomatist, he seizes the cheerful moment. Not only does he give them rum, but he gives them cigars, also from his private box—expensive cigars, just like these.

" ' I have a proposition to make,' he says. ' We are all sick of the war, and I myself am more sick of it than anybody.'

" They all stare at him, wondering what he will say next ; and the little Bavarian opens his blue eyes like a girl and stares more than any of them. He thinks perhaps the end of the world will come now.

" ' There is nobody here,' says the captain, ' that wishes to return. Why should we return ? There is a million dollars in diamonds aboard, enough to make every one of us rich. We are going to the great Republic. Good ! We will share equally. Every one of us shall have the same amount. I myself, although I am your captain, will take no more than Otto. That will be more than fifty thousand dollars for each.'

" Immediately, the last cloud melts away like magic from the crew. There is nothing but smiles all round him, smiles and the smell of rum and good cigars, just like these. They are all good comrades together, shaking hands, except the little Bavarian. He is sitting back behind the gyroscopic compass watching the captain with big eyes and a solemn face, like the infant Saint John.

" And why should they not all be satisfied, except the captain, who is, perhaps, only pretending to be satisfied ? They lose only a twentieth part of their money by including him. On the other hand, the captain loses a million dollars, to which these robbers had no more right than you, Roy. It would be as if you should dip your hand in my pocket, heh ? "

" I guess the little Bavarian was sorry he

spoke," said Roy, and he filled Vandermeer's glass again.

"The little Bavarian was a child, an innocent. He had no will to power, heh? He comes again to the captain late that night on deck, under the stars. His face looks thin and miserable. 'Captain,' he says, 'did you mean your words to those men?'

"'What else could I say, Otto, to save the diamonds and my life, and perhaps yours? You do not understand diplomacy, Otto.'

"The face of the little Bavarian grows brighter. 'Forgive me, my captain,' he says, 'but I had begun to doubt even you for a moment. I was thinking of the Fatherland.'

"Now, the captain was much obliged to Otto. His policy was complete in his mind for fooling those robbers, and he would have been glad to save this little Bavarian who had warned him. But he begins to see an obstacle. He thinks he will put this little fellow to the trial.

"'Come now, Otto,' he says, 'it is very well to think of the Fatherland if you and I could save her. But do you think a few hundred shining pebbles will make any odds? These robbers shall not have them. But, supposing we share them, there is nobody in the Fatherland that would be any poorer. They belong to the State, Otto, and if they should be shared with everyone in Germany not one man would be a pfennig the better. But see what a difference this would make to you and me! We are in a state of necessity, Otto; and above that state there is no power, as the Chancellor told the Reichstag. Very well, in this case I quote Louis the Fourteenth: "*l'Etat c'est Moi!*" Have I the might to do it, Otto? Very well, then, according to the spokesman of the Fatherland I have also the right.'

"'I do not understand you, my captain,' says this little blue-eyed baby, 'but I know well that you mean to do right.'

"'You shall have not fifty, but a hundred thousand dollars' worth for your share, Otto, because you have been faithful,' says the captain; 'but you must not think too many beautiful thoughts till we are safe on shore. I have arranged everything in my mind. Go down and sleep.'

"'For God's sake, captain,' cries this funny little fellow, dropping on his knees, 'tell me what you mean to do.' And the tears begin to roll down his face.

"'It is not safe to trust you yet, Otto. You might talk in your sleep,' says the captain. 'Do as I bid you. We shall see what we shall see.'

"Very well, Roy, there is at least four chapters to be made from that, heh?

"We come now to the crisis. The submarine is nearing the end of her voyage. They begin to see ships, and they submerge. The captain has told them, instead of making for New York he is heading for the coast of Maine, where there will be better opportunities of destroying the submarine and landing unobserved. It is about six o'clock in the evening when he takes a look through the periscope. They are within a short distance of the mainland, but they must lie on the bottom till midnight, when it will be safer to go ashore. They are all very happy. Once more he gives them rum all round, just like this, and advises them to sleep, for they will get no sleep after midnight. They sleep very soundly, all except the little Bavarian and the captain. Why? Because the captain keeps the medicine chest as well as the diamonds. If he had something stronger in his medicine chest it would have saved him much trouble and danger.

"While they sleep the captain takes out the diamonds from the strong box and puts them in his inside pockets. Then he examines the batteries. He is an expert engineer. He can make the batteries work when everyone else thinks they are dead. Also, he can make them die, so that even he can never make them work again. He examines other parts of the machinery, those which enable the submarine to rise to the surface. He will not allow the little Bavarian to watch what he is doing. Then he puts on his lifebelt and looks at the men snoring in their hammocks and on the floor. Some of them are stirring in their sleep. There is no time to lose, or he may be interrupted. At last he is ready. The submarine will never rise to the surface again, and the sea will never betray the secret. There is only one way for himself to get out, and it is not a pleasant way. But in his nightmares he has often rehearsed it, and he has always made sure that it could be done before he went to sea. There must always be a way out for one man at least, if not for more. '*L'Etat c'est Moi!*'

"He beckons to the little Bavarian. 'I have all the diamonds in my pocket,' he

says. 'The time is come for you to help me, Otto.'

"Now, Roy, you know what the conning-tower of a submarine is like inside. It is like a round chimney, with a lid at the top to keep out the water when you are submerged. You can climb up into this conning-tower and steer the ship from it if you wish. There is also another lid at the bottom of the conning-tower, which you can close as well. Then, if you wish, you can flood your chimney with water.

"Now, if a submarine cannot rise to the surface, it is possible for a man to climb into this conning-tower. Another man, then, closes the lid below, and floods the tower very slowly. When the water reaches the head of the man in the tower there is just enough pressure for him to push open the lid at the top and shoot up to the surface. The lid at the top can then be closed from the interior of the submarine. The lower lid can be opened slowly, and the water from the tower pours out into the hull. Then, perhaps, another man can climb up into the tower, and the process can be repeated. There is only room for one man at a time.

"The captain tells the little Bavarian that he is going to do this.

"'But, my captain, it is very dangerous. You may be drowned. It is not certain that you can open it. The pressure may be too great above.'

"'It is for the Fatherland, Otto,' says the captain, and the little Bavarian salutes, standing at attention, just like a pretty little wax doll.

"'When the men awake, you will be able to follow by the same road,' says the captain, and he climbs up into the conning-tower.

"The lower lid is closed. The water begins to creep up around the captain's knees in the darkness. He is horribly frightened. He has a crowbar in his hand to help him open the upper lid quickly, but he still thinks perhaps it will not open. When the water has reached his waist he begins to push at the upper lid, but it cannot move yet. The weight of the whole sea above is pressing it down. He knows it cannot move, but he cannot help pushing at it till the sweat breaks out on him, though the water is like ice. It is worse than he expected, worse than any of his nightmares. The water reaches to his neck. He struggles with all his strength, and still the lid will not move. A prayer comes to his lips. The cold water creeps—creeps over his chin. There are only three inches now between his face and the lid. He holds his head back to keep his nostrils above the water, fighting, fighting always to open the lid. Then the water covers his face. The conning-tower is full. He holds his breath, gives one last push, and feels the lid opening, opening softly, like the big steel door of a safe in a bank. His crowbar is wedged under the lid, between the hinges, just as he wished. In four seconds he is shooting up, up, with his chest bursting, like a diver that has seen a shark, to the surface.

¶

"FOR a minute he floats there, in the darkness, under the stars. Then, perhaps the struggle has been greater even than he knew, he faints. It is fortunate that his lifebelt is a good one, for when he recovers he has floated perhaps a long time. He is very cold. He takes a drink of rum from his flask, and gets his bearings. He is two miles from the coast. Yes, but he is a clever man. There is one of those little islands, covered with pine trees, just a hundred-and-fifty yards away. There is also a little wooden house on the island and a little landing-stage, with a dinghy hauled up on the shore.

"The owner of the boat is careful. He has taken his oars to bed with him. But the captain is a clever man. It is a beautiful night. He has plenty of time, and he can paddle with one of the loose boards in the bottom of the dinghy."

"But, listen! What became of the little Bavarian?" said Mimika.

"Well, I was not there to see," said Captain Vandermeer, lighting a cigar. "But when the men awoke they must all have tried to get out by the same way."

"And they couldn't?" asked Roy. He was watching Vandermeer with a very curious expression, almost as if he were examining an eye-witness.

"The captain was an expert engineer, ah, a magnificent engineer, as I told you, Roy, and there was a little crowbar wedged under what we have been calling the lid of the conning-tower."

"Good God, what an idea! You mean they couldn't close the upper lid again?"

"They might think they had closed it." Vandermeer gave a deep guttural chuckle.

"Then they would open the lower lid, heh?"

"And then?"

"Why, then the sea would come running into the hull, and they would be drowned."

"Oh, but not the poor little Bavarian!" said Mimika.

"'*L'Etat c'est Moi*,'" said Vandermeer with a smile.

Roy was looking at him still, with the same pensive expression as of a youthful Buddha.

"I suppose he had no difficulty in getting rid of the diamonds!" he said.

"Probably not," said Vandermeer. "Perhaps he would keep a few as a little reserve—a kind of Landsturm. But he would buy Liberty Bonds, heh?"

"And you mean to say that a man like that is going about in the United States now?" said Mimika.

Vandermeer chuckled again.

"Who knows?" he said. "Perhaps he has come to Southern California. Perhaps he has bought a nice little ranch—a fruit ranch—just like this, heh? where he shall live a happy and healthy life to the age of a hundred. And now, Mimika, it is getting time for little girls to go to bed."

About two o'clock in the morning Mimika was awakened by a guttural, choking cry from her husband. She was so startled that she slipped out of bed and stood staring at him. The moon was flooding the room almost like a searchlight, and Captain Vandermeer lay in the full stream of it. While she watched him he rose slowly to a sitting posture, with his eyes still shut and his hands clenched above his face. He began muttering to himself, in a low voice at first, and then so loudly that it echoed through the house, and the words sounded more like German than Dutch. Then he began fighting for breath like a man in a nightmare. He tore his pyjama jacket open over the great, red, hairy chest.

"Otto," he shouted at the top of his voice, "Otto!" Then with a huge sigh he sank back on the pillows, whispering: "I have opened it."

There was a tap on the door. Mimika snatched up the first garment she could lay her hands on (it happened to be Vandermeer's dressing-gown), wrapped it round her, glided across the room, and opened the door. Her brother stood there, also in his dressing-gown, and barefooted. Their eyes met, without a word. He took her hand, led her outside and closed the door quietly behind them.

"You heard him, Roy?" she whispered.

"Come downstairs," he said, "I want to ask you some questions about this."

They went down to the den at the back of the house and stood there looking at each other's faces, looking the question that neither was able to put into words.

"He told us a tale to-night," said Roy at last.

"Yes," said Mimika faintly.

"Do you know what he was calling out in his nightmare?"

"It sounded like German," she said.

"Yes, it was German, and it gave me a good deal more local colour than I expected. That was a true story all right, Mimika."

"You mean that he——"

"Yes."

"Oh, but Roy!"

"That's his dressing-gown you're wearing, isn't it?"

"Yes, I picked it up in a hurry."

"There's been too much hurry about everything, I'm afraid. Why the devil did I go to Europe? Here, Mimika, take off that thing and put mine on. I don't like to see you in it. It doesn't suit you, little sister."

She obeyed him, with a small white, frightened face, but it was not the white of powder now. Roy thrust his hand into the pocket of Vandermeer's dressing-gown. Something jingled. He pulled out a bunch of keys.

"Vandermeer told me I was good at following up a clue. I'm going to follow one now, Mimika," he said. "This is the key of the safe."

He opened the safe, looked hastily at the bundles of papers, and then pulled out the chamois-leather bag.

"Look here, Mimika," he said, and poured a glittering river of diamonds, several hundreds of them, on to the table. The moonlight played over them with an uncanny brilliance.

"That's his Landsturm," said Roy, "and that settles it."

He took Mimika's hand, and she made no protest and he withdrew the wedding ring from her finger, and added it to the glittering heap on the table.

There was a heavy footstep in the room above. Vandermeer was awake and moving about upstairs. The boards creaked over

their heads, then they heard his bedroom door open and the heavy footsteps began to descend the stairs.

Mimika shrank behind her brother, and both stood motionless, waiting. They could hear the heavy breathing of Vandermeer, the breathing of a man roused from a dyspeptic sleep. He came down with an intolerable precision, making the twelve steps of that short descent seem almost interminable. At every step Mimika felt the edges of her heart freezing. At last he reached the foot of the stairs, and with three more shuffling steps, as of a gigantic ape, the big, hairy bulk of Vandermeer stood in the doorway facing them across the glittering mound of gems. The sharp searchlight of the moon made his face corpse-like, showing up the puffy blue pouches under his eyes and picking out the coarse red hairs of his bushy beard like strands of copper wire. His eyes protruded and his mouth opened twice without any sound but the soft smacking sound of his tongue as he tried to moisten his lips.

"What are you doing here?" he said at last.

"Looking at your Landsturm," said Roy with all the deadly calm of his nation.

Vandermeer swayed a little on his feet like a drunken man. Then he moved forward to the table and blinked at the diamonds and the gold ring crowning them.

"I don't understand," he said at last.

"You'd better get dressed, Mimika," said Roy. "Our train goes at a quarter after four." He led her to the door, watched her pathetic little figure mounting the stairs, and turned to Vandermeer again.

Mimika never knew what passed between the two men. When she came out of her room ten minutes later Roy was waiting, fully dressed, at the foot of the stairs, with his suitcase in his hand. She heard the heavy breathing of Vandermeer in his den; and, out of the corner of her eye, as they passed the door she saw that glowing mass on the table as if a fragment of the moon had been dropped there.

They walked down the avenue of palms in silence. In the waiting-room at the station neither of them spoke till they heard the long hoot of the approaching train and the clangour of the bell on the transcontinental locomotive.

Six months later, Mimika and her mother were sitting up for Roy in their fourth-floor flat near the offices of the Copley-Willard Publishing Company in Philadelphia.

"I wish he didn't have to keep these late hours," said her mother. "I thought that everything was turning out for the best when you were married to Julius. I have never been able to understand why you got your divorce so quickly. It was all kept so quiet, and you and Roy are so mysterious about it. You've never even told me the real grounds, I'm sure."

"Yes, I did. It was desertion," said Mimika grimly.

"Does nobody know what became of him? It seems so strange that he should have gone away and left all the furniture in that house. He had some lovely things, too. I think you might at least have claimed the furniture."

"Please, Mother, don't talk about that or we shall be making the same mistake again. I expect he's shaved his beard by now."

"Mimika, child, what do you mean? Are you crazy?"

"I think we were both crazy, Mother. a year ago."

"Well, I thought it was all for your happiness, my pet," said her mother, dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief. "I'm afraid it will be a long time before you can marry this other young man that Roy likes so much. He isn't earning half as good a salary as Roy."

"I don't know that I'm going to marry anyone, Mother. But, listen! I feel like marrying the first good American that comes to me with a piece of the original *Mayflower* in his buttonhole.

And this time her mother really listened.

# Where Are You Going?

*"Life treads on life, and heart on heart"*

## By KURT MUNZER

*(Specially translated for the* ARGOSY *by Marjorie J. Launder).*

**Kurt Munzer is recognised in his own country as one of the leading short story writers of the younger German school His work, and especially this story, is characterised by a restlessness which is typical of the modern spirit, while it is here expressed with an entirely fresh and charming simplicity.**

IT was scarcely a village in which Vreneli was born; it was a group of little cottages, huddled together in the valley on the southern side of the mountain. It did not even lie on the mountain pass, but was connected with it by a bridle path, running beside the dry bed of a stream.

No stranger had ever seen these little hovels: the bridle path did not attract them. The peasants living here had very little land, one or two head of cattle, a cow perhaps and a pig or a goose—no more. It had happened—but not very often, that one of the young men with more enterprise than his fellows, had set off for the town. Gone with his pack on his back and never returned. Others just longed to see the world but never did more than spend a day's holiday in the neighbouring village. The women did not approve of this; they stayed at home and on Sundays went to hear a visiting priest in the gaudy little white-washed church. Sometimes a young woman would go with her fiancé to the annual church bazaar or the archery contest in the county town. Then she would come back, establish herself as mistress of one of the little homes—and forget.

But Vreneli's parents were poor. She knew nothing but the mountain side and the sky above it. She had several times climbed up the slope to see from where the brook came, or what was on the other side of the mountain, or how the sky looked elsewhere.

She was seventeen when her father died. Her mother died during the simple little burial service beside his open grave. Vreneli went home alone to the little cottage which was no longer hers for it was too heavily mortgaged.

The following Sunday, when the priest came as usual, he brought her news that at the inn, higher up the pass, they wanted a girl to work in the house, tend the cattle and serve in the café.

Vreneli went with him after the service, all her worldly goods in a little rucksack on her back When they came to the main road they parted. The priest was going east, and she had to make her way upwards towards the sun which was already sinking behind the summit of the mountain.

The road to Tessin was seldom trodden by strangers. For the space of three hours Vreneli saw no speck on the horizon, heard no human sound, passed no dwelling. The way led through a wood and then between open fields. There were sharp bends, and, pausing, the girl had wonderful vistas between the peaks, views of the St. Gothard, glaciers, torrents, and in the distance a misty blue fragrant country—Italy.

Few foot passengers and fewer vehicles passed this way. In winter it was completely deserted. No mail had to use this road. The inn was isolated from the world for many long months in the year. The proprietors, pious old folk, had learnt to forget the social life down in the valley. The house was buried in snow from October till April. Not a soul came near it. The old people collected in advance stores of potatoes, flour, root vegetables and even cabbages. They occupied themselves during their isolation with sewing, wood-carving, cooking, tending the cattle, letting themselves be snowed-in the while. They read the Bible and the newspapers which a few tourists had left behind them during the summer months. So they passed the winter in their close, over-heated rooms.

With the return of spring they thawed. Tints of blue came floating into the sky, borne from Italy on the warm, fragrant,

southern wind. They ceased to light fires in the big stoves which scattered sparks on the rug. At night the wind howled. The old house, even the mountain on which it stood, seemed to totter. The father rose and went down to see if the stables were secure. Then he came back, climbed into bed and fell asleep again. Everybody slept; they all trusted in their God to guard them against the fury of the elements.

The girl lived in this house for three years. During this time she never went further than an hour's walk from it, she never met anyone but the few people she served with drinks. But those who came there, in whatever haste they might be, stood still, gazed—with a half-frightened look at the never-ending view, meditating on eternity and their own short span. There was always a wind blowing through the pass. With the exception of a little lake which lay gloomily in a hollow and which was frozen seven months out of twelve, there was nothing to break the monotony of the heath all around; not a tree, not a bush, only rocks and stones, and in the hollows, snow the whole year round. It was a horribly elevated world, where no one could live without committing suicide or growing superhuman with it.

All the tourists finally went, however. Having toiled up one side they dived down the other; all—men and horses. A man hardly ever stayed the night up there. Vreneli did her work: did the cleaning in the house, drove the cattle in and out of the stables, fetched wine or milk into the café, sometimes perhaps omelette or potato pie. She did not die of boredom. Only a great yearning began to burn her soul and became intensified with every fresh sign she had from the huge unknown world.

She never wondered where the tourists had been, whence they came; she only longed to know where they were going. Where, oh where? A carriage drove up. It was taking a happy young couple to the south; and while they were drinking the red Tessin wine, Vreneli leant over the railings of the porch and asking the driver: "Where are you taking them? Where are you going?" She asked the students whom she served, the dealers, the wandering odd-job men, the jolly tourists: "Please would you mind telling me where you are going?" With dark wistful eyes she would look into the distance, hoping there to see the towns they mentioned. But no—nothing but blue-grey mist. In the evening she would climb up into the attic and, leaning on the sill, would gaze out of the window into the darkness. The stars appeared and the night wind rose, making her shiver. She thought perhaps she would hear, in this silence, the music of the planets, as they moved in space. Yes!—even the stars passed by—rose and fell. Whither did they fall? The moon followed its course slowly but surely: the sun sank to other horizons. Everything was in motion, in haste, not to be checked, with a destination in view—where was it though? If only the girl knew where.

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VRENELI met the eyes of strangers who had seen the world. Many young fellows and even dignified men laid a hand on her arm, said they would like to stay there, wondered whether perhaps they might meet her that evening in the garden. Oh, but what mattered was that she wished they would stay! She wanted them to take her with them and she wanted to know where they would take her. None of them thought of that. They all left her, they did not need her. And she went to the bend in the road and looked after them as they went down the slope, and followed them in her sad longing thoughts. They disappeared — where? They went down into the wide world—thousands of towns, plains, seas, new mountains . . .

The girl lay awake listening. The storm was raging—where? She heard a step: someone was walking out there in the starlight. She wondered where they were going. A little stream was babbling and she heard the water falling—where? The pregnant cow was bellowing in the stables, the dog whined in his sleep, the old folk in the next room were snoring. She lay awake and longed—for what? Finally, after three years she thought of nothing else but this one question—whither? There were few words spoken in the house; Vreneli found it difficult to converse with any of these people around her; this burning question possessed her.

Vreneli had grown beautiful. She was a dark mountain spirit, her eyes were dark blue, her hair as black as night. She was as tall and strong and slender as a tree. The habit of carrying milk pails and buckets of water on her head had rounded her neck wonderfully and her shoulders were perfectly

chiselled. The sun had tinted her skin to a warm brown, she radiated warmth and light, and a dignity which awoke respect.

A young artist, however, when he saw her, could not control his feelings. He was a foreigner. He came into the inn at about midday and wanted to spend the night there. He asked for red wine and made Vreneli taste it for him.

" How beautiful you are ! " he said, and played with longing fingers on her neck and arms. " Come with me ! "

She stared at him . . . He had given her the word of deliverance. The weight of the whole range of mountains fell from her shoulders. She felt as though she must float as a star which has no anchor.

" Would you like to ? " said the young man, who saw her soul in her eyes, and understood her . . .

When the old people were asleep she left the house with her old rucksack. The stranger was waiting at the first bend. It was still half light, the glow of the sunset lay over the peaks ; there was silence in the eternal orb ; the newly created, virgin world was sinking into its first sleep.

He greeted the girl with a shout. She strode along beside him as vigorously as he. She did not want caresses and tender words ; only on ! on !

" Where are we going ? " she asked. This question and its answer was life itself to her.

He laughed. He felt as if he owned the world. They walked on all night, choosing byways and footpaths in order to avoid meeting anybody. In the morning they saw the sun reflected in a lake, Maggiore—a hollow filled with fragrance and blueness. And beyond it stretched a plain, from the level of which rose the undulating towers of a large city : the rosy-white gleam of a marble cathedral—Milan.

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NOW the years were passing. The lonely old pass had been widened, there was a motor road, and the magnificent summit with the many beautiful views had grown accustomed to the busy traffic. But the old hotel still stood ; only there had been a few new apartments annexed. The old folks could not decide to move with the times. Only now they employed a boy to do the rough work, a woman in the house, and a pretty girl to attend to customers. Many people now stayed in the hotel and lunch and dinner had always to be ready.

But the delivery van which now came through the pass, brought provisions speedily ; fresh meat, fruit and vegetables and even new bread every day. The old mother spent most of her life in the kitchen so that her cooking soon won a high reputation among tourists. This sort of life full of bustle and gaiety lasted for four or five months ; then the winter set in. The boy went down into the valley, but the women stayed, the elder, quiet and sleepy, the younger, pale, wistful, lying awake at night, listening to the wind in the distance, longing to be able to follow it.

At the end of the summer, soon after the first fall of snow, a motor-car purred up the pass, a heavy Italian-built tourist. Only one lady sat in it, however, a lady in expensive furs, beautiful as a girl but pale and sad-looking. She sent the chauffeur into the saloon and ordered just a glass of milk to be brought out to her. The girl came out with it, but the stranger did not look at her. She was staring at the wonderfully clear view across the mountains and seemed lost in thought. She could see into the land of her youth and oh ! what sad thoughts ! Even when our later life is as happy as our childhood, such memories may bring tears with them. But this woman—was she as happy now as then ?

At last she became aware of the girl standing there, thanked her for the milk and began to sip it. Suddenly she heard a gentle voice saying :

" Where are you going, madam ? "

She looked into two longing eyes, hungry for life. She started. She thought : " Am I she who is standing there asking ? Does history always repeat itself ? Is everybody alike and every life in vain ?—One giving place to another and yet none reaching the goal ? " Eternal longing, ceaseless unrest ; an unquenchable thirst !

Her chauffeur came back.

" Go on ! " she cried.

Her heart fluttered with sympathy, shame, love, despair . . . and longing.

" Where ? " she said to the girl. " Do not ask, do not seek, do not go ! Never, never can one get there . . . "

And already she was flying off into the land that is never reached.

# The Box-Office Girl

*Telling of what the fates prepared for Miss Elaine Edar*

By ARNOLD BENNETT

THE Rotunda Royal, as everyone who knows the world knows, lifts its immense mass of yellow masonry (not really masonry but iron thinly faced with stone) right in the middle of London. It is the largest music-hall in London, and the most successful music-hall in London; and it burns more electricity than any other place of amusement in London. Its upper parts are glitteringly outlined in green and yellow electricity; its high tower can be glimpsed from all manner of streets, and the rich glow of the whole affair illuminates a cloudy sky for the whole of central London to see. Though entirely respectable, it has an altar of its own in the hearts of the young and the old bloods of provincial cities who come to town strictly on business. It is the Mecca of suburban inhabitants with a dull afternoon in front of them and ten shillings in their pockets to squander To have his, or her, name printed in fire on the façade of the Rotunda is the ambition of every music-hall artist in the world, and of many another artist besides. In brief, the Rotunda is a very important, grandiose, and impressive organism, an organism which emphatically "functions." And it is a household word. Even judges of the High Court have heard of the Rotunda. No daily paper in London ever appears without some mention of it somewhere.

Now daily and nightly behind a counter on your left as you enter by the main entrance into the grand foyer stood, until lately, a girl named Elaine Edar. She was a blonde, with bright hair, an attractive, pretty and benevolent face, and a good figure — because these attributes were essential to her position. Her simple, smart dress was of black, but it had touches of fantasy and of colour—because Mr. Walter King (managing director—risen from call-boy, as he openly stated about ten times every day) had said that he did not care for his girls to look like hotel clerks. Elaine's face and hair were known to tens of thousands of people. Often in the street such people would start at the sight of her and murmur something to a companion, and Elaine knew that they were saying

"That's the box-office girl at the Rotunda."

So that she had a certain importance on earth, and assuredly at the Rotunda. For she gathered in money, and to Mr. Walter King ("Old Wal" behind his back, to his employees, and "Wally" without concealment to those proud persons who had the great privilege of his intimacy)—to Mr. Walter King the Rotunda was in the end nothing but a machine for gathering in more money than it paid out. Not that Elaine was the sole instrument for gathering in money. Far from it! Above her counter were displayed the words: "Box office for this performance only. Boxes. Royal Fauteuils. Royal Stalls. Stalls. Grand Balcony." All advance booking was done in a special office up the street, and each of the unreserved parts of the house had its own entrance, with turnstile and money-taker. Still, Elaine took a goodish bit of money twice a day, and she was easily the most prominent of all the human machines that received silver coins and notes in exchange for bits of coloured paper or base-metal discs.

Twelve performances a week—and Elaine had to be on duty ten minutes before the doors opened and to remain on duty until one hour before the end of each performance. Then she had to check her money and prove to the cashier's department that the total was correct. An anxious job, especially during the "rush" quarter of an hour, when she had to read with the glance of an eagle the numbers on the "sheet" of the performance, treat every patron as a benefactor, return good for evil, give change like a flash of lightning, detect spurious coins in the tenth of a second, and render sweet smiles to louts, curmudgeons and cats! Happily she was by nature profoundly and

universally benevolent—and in this respect indeed a wonder to her assistant who did the telephoning and lent a general hand. It was her benevolent air that had recommended her to Mr. Walter King, who had sacked her predecessor for being hoity-toity to patrons whenever business was abnormally good. She was devoted to the theatre. Nobody thought of her apart from the theatre, and in fact she had little private life. Mr. Walter King was himself passionately devoted to the theatre, and he expected all the staff to be passionately devoted to the theatre; but whereas his own devotion brought in a large share of the profits, Elaine's devotion brought in only a small fixed salary, which Mr. King did not dream of passionately increasing when business grew fabulous. Elaine saw nothing odd in this arrangement.

It was a quarter to ten. The day's work was nearly over. Elaine's assistant had gone. The entrance-hall and foyer blazed, deserted, with their super-lavish electricity. When an idle programme-girl swung open a door at the end of a vast corridor and peeped forth, Elaine could faintly catch the sound of clapping. She rarely got more of a performance than these brief distant rumours of applause. For her the Rotunda was not an auditorium but a foyer with box-office; and the artists were mere names on bills. She estimated the quality of the applause and glanced at the clock and the time-table to know who was being applauded, for she had to be in a position to inform patrons what artist was "on" at any given moment. Then she proceeded with the secret counting of notes on a shelf beneath the counter. In view of the absence of a grille to protect the counter and of the prevalence of gangs of robbers in London, her situation with all that money for Mr. Walter King might seem perilous. But it was not so in reality. Elaine and her treasure were well guarded by formidable giants and astute dwarfs in the shape of gorgeous doormen and pages. Though he disapproved of grilles, Mr. Walter King took no chances with the night's receipts. Elaine was as safe as a priestess in a temple, dedicated, imprisoned, inviolate.

Then a dark and elegant young man in full evening panoply appeared from the street. The guardians saluted him. He saluted Elaine. This unidentified and mysterious gentleman came nearly every night towards ten o'clock. Elaine guessed that he came to witness the performance of the Russian dancer, the incomparably illustrious Feodora.

"Did you keep the fauteuil for me, Miss Edar?" (He had picked up her name from somewhere, it seemed.)

She nodded, kindly smiling. She liked the regular visitant, not in the least because he was regular, but because he was dark, elegant, slim, and had a sad, wistful smile. Yes, she had kept the stall for him, despite the fact that if he had not come to claim it she would have had to pay for it out of her own pocket. He usually telephoned just before the rush, and Elaine had accepted the risk of his not coming quite a dozen times. Occasionally, as to-night, he would try to get a box, and if successful would pay for both the box and the stall. And he would show amazing indecisions. To-night she had no box to sell; the sole empty seat in the house was the one she had retained for him; and yet in his rich, low voice he would keep talking about a box, and also she had to repeat to him several times precisely where the stall was in regard to the stage.

At length he paid, raised his hat again, and went off towards the auditorium, followed by her benedictory, sympathetic smile. The head-doorman, his pocket gaping for the harvest of sixpences which he would shortly garner for putting patrons into cars and taxis, winked at her rather broadly, as if to indicate that the dark gentleman was queer in the head. But Elaine gently deprecated the wink, seeing in the dark gentleman a victim of hopeless love for a Russian dancer. Silence fell upon the foyer, whose ceiling was upheld by the immobile figures of pink, nude girls.

Elaine had taken out the self-locking steel cash-drawer from its niche, detached and hidden the telephone, and was about to disappear through the little door behind the counter, when Rachel Gordon hurried up rather breathless from somewhere. "I'm the publicity lady," Rachel would introduce herself to the new artists in the wings and in dressing-rooms when she wanted material for piquant press-paragraphs. She did all the day-to-day publicity work for the Rotunda. A pretty Jewess, with full lips and eyes, waved hair, striking clothes, carefully tended complexion, and a general air of knowing all that was worth knowing: not quite young, but far from old! She spent every evening

in the theatre, and little in it escaped her attention.

"Feo asked me to give you this note," said she. "I'm so glad I've caught you before you'd gone."

She handed the note, with a characteristic, sparkling glance that was full of chicane and the spirit of plotting. "Feo!" Thus she familiarly referred to the great, the unique Feodora! But then she managed to be very friendly with all, and she could be highly useful even to the greatest.

As Elaine read the note she showed extreme astonishment. It ran: "My dear Miss Edar, I give a party to-morrow night at the Fantasy Club, some friends, dancing, fun. Will you come? I do hope. Your obliged Feo." Indeed the thing was enough to astonish a box-office girl. "Your obliged." Elaine knew what that referred to. A fortnight earlier, when a not uncommon state of war existed between Feodora and Mr. Walter King, Feodora had been unable to get two free seats for friends. She had most particularly wanted those seats, even if it should be necessary to pay for them. But she was too haughty to tell Mr. King that she would pay for them, and so she had herself run round (furs and pearls and all—as described by Rachel for the press) to implore Elaine to allot seats to her even though all seats were sold. And Elaine, by methods known to box-office keepers only, had bestowed upon her the two desired seats—and Mr. Walter King not a penny the wiser! Feodora, in the generosity of her impulsive, poetic heart, had not forgotten.

"Shall you come?" asked Rachel, who evidently knew what was in the scrawled note.

"I—I haven't a rag to wear," answered Elaine, much flustered.

"Oh, stuff!" observed Rachel simply. "You're always awfully well turned out. Everybody knows that."

"But evening wear——" protested Elaine, despite a secret mistrust of Rachel.

"Oh, stuff!" Rachel repeated.

Elaine could scarcely sleep that night. It was an incredible happening. She rose early to look through her wardrobe.

II

THE Fantasy Club, scene of Feodora's party, was in Goodge Street, off Tottenham Court Road. Elaine had never heard of it, and indeed had some difficulty in finding it, since its portal was hidden at the end of a long covered passage and showed no signs of festivity. No wonder the conductor of the motor-bus by which she travelled could give her no information about it! In the lobby she saw a printed notice: "Breakfasts served from 5 a.m." This frightened her, but she was reassured by the sight of Rachel Gordon in the cloakroom.

Rachel gave the names of sundry high-brow novelists and painters and musicians who regularly frequented the club, and she said that in the art of turning night into day they were the greatest experts in London. Rachel laughed at the nocturnal pretensions of the more famous dancing-clubs—she scorned them as "bourgeois." Anyone could join them, but according to Rachel not anyone could join the Fantasy. You had to be someone or the approved friend of someone to be admitted to the Fantasy.

The dancing-room was large, low, and very bare—compared to the ornate interiors of the Rotunda. It had no decorations except electric lights in Chinese lanterns, and the costumes of the ladies. These decorations, however, were extremely effective. The room was full; it was also noisy and torrid. Revellers were eating, drinking, dancing, chattering, laughing, and giggling, with much gusto.

"There's Feo's table," said Rachel, pointing to the biggest and busiest table in the place, and led Elaine towards it. Elaine was nervous.

"How sweet of you!" the slim and gorgeous Feo greeted her. "How sweet you look! No! It is more than sweet. I understand now when Carly does say how you are *exotique*. It is so. Yes. Sit down. Have drink? Have chicken? Or soup? Yes. Soup first. Rachel, occupy yourself with Miss." Feodora turned to two young men, who kissed her hand.

Elaine listened eagerly to the confused talk at the table, but, though all laughed or giggled, she heard nothing that struck her as amusing. No doubt the humour was being accomplished in French or Russian, of which languages Elaine had no knowledge. However, all the ladies looked either lovely or strange. She was still very shy, but she was mysteriously happy, too—somehow uplifted.

"Who is Carly?" she murmured to Rachel, and Rachel by a discreet turn of the

head indicated a young man who stood behind Feodora against the wall. Elaine started and flushed. It was the nightly visitant for whom she reserved stalls. The word "exotic" in the tiny mouth of Feodora had already exercised Elaine, who could not comprehend how anybody could regard her as deserving of such an adjective. That the nightly visitant should deem her exotic, and should have said so to a high goddess like Feodora, almost disturbed her —while enchanting her! Rachel beckoned to the nightly visitant, who approached.

"Mr. Lyeskov," said Rachel. "Miss Edar. I think you have met."

She laughed. Mr. Lyeskov blushed.

The next moment Elaine became aware that her hand had been kissed. A unique experience. Hand-kissing was, of course, "foreign" and somewhat foolish, but it was surprisingly delicious, even flattering. So this was the young man who, while paying for stalls from which to worship Feodora, had found time to examine herself and to decide that she was exotic. Yes, disturbing! Disturbing!

He now asked her to dance. Could she refuse? How ridiculous! Unfortunately, in the dance she could not think of a single thing to say to him. He was a fine dancer, but scarcely cleverer as a talker than Elaine. They just danced, yielded themselves to the music and the movement. It was exquisite.

"You are a natural dancer. You have the gift," he remarked.

She smiled. She knew that she was a natural dancer. She had no more learnt to dance than she had learnt to breathe; she rarely danced—and only in suburban resorts with one or two dull acquaintances; yet she knew all the steps and never erred, never hesitated. They danced two consecutive dances. As he restored her to the table he asked if he might dance again with her very soon. Feodora called to him.

"How did you get on?" Rachel demanded of Elaine, with a peculiar glance.

"Oh, splendid! He's asked me for another dance."

"And did you refuse?"

"Ought I?"

"Don't be silly. Can't you see he's mad about you? Why do you suppose he comes to get tickets off you every night? Why do you suppose he got Feo to ask you here to-night? And let me tell you—he may be a French-Russian, but he's very serious and very rich. *He* didn't lose anything in the Revolution, he didn't! Pity he's so shy, isn't it?"

Elaine's face burned again. The fact is, she was overwhelmed, absolutely overwhelmed, as she realised bit by bit that "Carly" came nightly to the Rotunda not to worship Feodora but to worship her! It was staggering! She was glad when a male performer in Feodora's troupe invited her on to the floor. She did not care for his face, nor for his coarse manners, nor yet for his dancing — how different from "Carly's"!—but he enabled her to escape from Rachel Gordon's enigmatic scrutiny. As she went round the room with the professional dancer something happened to her and she half stumbled and turned wholly pale. It was a night of sensations, blushes, and pallors, such a night as she had never before known. The dancer looked at his faltering partner inquiringly, but said no word, and Elaine recovered herself. No one knew, no one could guess, what had happened to her. And after all it was naught. She had only caught sight of Ned seated at a table with another man, and he had seemed to be somewhat unprosperous and defiant, in his shabby evening-dress. And he looked older, thinner, worn.

Ned was the one man who had entered into that private life of hers the existence of which none of the patrons of the Rotunda could visualise. It was six years ago, when she was twenty-one, and before her connexion with the life of music-halls. Ned was an advertising-agent and lots of things besides—he had had a hand in promoting one or two of the earlier dance clubs. He was up one month and down the next. He had defects, but he had made love to her, proposed to her, been accepted. She gave him all her heart; she learnt rapturously to love love. The world became magical. The date of the wedding was fixed. Then Ned came one day and said that candour was best, and that the sole manly course was to confess to her. What? What? That he had mistaken his feelings. That he had found that he did not care for her "in that way." Whereas he did care for Alice "in that way" and Alice cared for him "in that way." That, of course, he was hers to command, but would it not be better for her sake and for the sake of them all if she . . .? He was extremely sorry. He did not and could not defend himself. . . . Alice was a friend of hers. had but a few

months before been congratulating her on her betrothal to nice Ned. Ned married Alice. And so that was that. Elaine's tragic grief softened gradually into vague regret, and vague regret changed into a vague feeling that perhaps she had done well to lose Ned. Such stories lie buried in the memory of numberless girls who go through life apparently as though butter had never melted in their mouths. And you dig up the stories with difficulty, with amazement. . . .

Well, she had caught sight of Ned Haltright.

The next minute his table was empty. She hoped he had not seen her, and could not help thinking that he had. Undoubtedly she had had a shock. But, after powdering herself anew and drinking some champagne, she put her hand once again in the hand of Carly Lyeskov, and felt his right hand lightly on her back, and resumed the dance with him, the effects of the shock soon disappeared. She glimpsed herself in a mirror and was satisfied with the vision. Idle to deny that she was pretty, had a good figure, or that her frock was smart! She was as presentable as most, and more so than a lot of them, though her only trinket was a necklace of Chinese-dyed mother-of-pearl. Carly's worship of her blossomed like a flower. It was heavenly to be worshipped, to be able to confer a favour by merely consenting to exist. She had a sense of dominion which intoxicated. And then there was the band, the colours, the movement, the feeling of being surrounded by illustrious and witty artists — she wondered who was who! And Carly was so distinguished. His very shirt-front was a miracle. And he was so deferential.

"May I ask where you live?"

She told him Fulham.

"I suppose you would not let me drive you home in my car?"

Yes, she would—he was really too kind! Romance! Romance! Soon she was thinking that Carly was unique in the whole world—so sympathetic he was! And he worshipped her. He had gone off his head about her. Triumph! Power! Dizziness! It was silently established between them that they would dance every dance together! And they did. The Fantasy faded to a dim background for their emotions. And Elaine looked with pity at her past life, at the horrid grind and daily work, at her loneliness —because behind her counter she was nearly as lonely as a bus-driver, and at home in her rooms she was terribly lonely. How had she supported it? Could she possibly continue to support it?

At three o'clock, when the gaiety was at its apogee she said she thought she must go home. Not that she wanted to go home or had any reason for going home. She wanted simply to command him and to prove to the entire Fantasy Club that he was hers to command. She took leave of Feodora, who poured over her a delicious cascade of protests. And Carly did drive her to Fulham—Parson's Green it was. No little "liberties" in the large, smooth-gliding car, such as are expected and condoned by the primmest maidens after such ecstasies, in such circumstances, at such an hour! Nothing but the deepest respect! Yes, he was "serious." . . . She leaned forward suddenly and tapped on the window. The car stopped. Mr. Lyeskov sprang to the pavement, handed her out, removed his hat, kissed her hand, and was richly rewarded by her smile under the lamp-post. He waited until she had found her latch-key and opened the door. Of course it was a poor little suburban house. But she knew that that didn't matter. It was where she lived. Her presence in it transformed it for him. Another smile from her; another bow from him. She shut the door. The car drove off.

## III

ELAINE went to bed in a state of ecstatic blissful excitement. No sooner had she laid herself down than she heard the prolonged trill of the front-door bell in the back room. She occupied the two rooms which constituted the third or top floor of the old house. (In earlier days she had had only one room, but destiny had been fairly kind to her.) The front room was a sort of bed-sitting-room; the back was a kitchen-scullery-dining-room. The floor was her home and held all that she possessed. Compared to many young and ageing women in her situation of life she was affluent and of luxurious habit. Now there were four bells on the front door, each labelled. Sometimes, and especially at night, visitors got confused and rang the wrong bell. Elaine thought that on this occasion the wrong bell had been rung.

"They'll have to keep on ringing," she

said. After all, the bell did not make a great deal of noise. The bell continued to ring.

"Nobody can possibly be wanting me at this time of night," she said.

Nevertheless she put on her dressing-gown and opened the window and looked forth and down. But she could not see who was ringing because of the wide, leaded eaves of the old-fashioned porch. She shut the window and shut out the invading chill of the dark night. At length the persistent bell began to exasperate her fatigued nerves, and with an annoyed, apprehensive shrug, she crept step by creaking step all the way downstairs and softly undid the front-door.

Ned Haltright was standing in the porch. She gave a start, and instinctively drew the thin peignoir more tightly round her shoulders. As she did so, she stiffened, looking at him. She was affronted, angered, by this inexcusable visitation. Nothing but sheer good nature prevented her from shutting the door in Ned's face.

"I saw you at the Club——" he commenced.

"Not so loud, *please!*" She stopped him in a sharp whisper, thinking of her immaculate reputation in the crowded house that so often buzzed with gossip. To have come home at God knows what hour in a car was bad enough, but to receive male callers still later . . . !

"I want to see you. I must talk to you," Ned whispered plaintively.

"Not now," she whispered.

"Yes, now."

She shook her head firmly.

"Fancy coming here now," she whispered, in still colder reproof. "And how on earth did you get here, at this time?"

"Walked," he whispered.

"Walked?" she whispered.

"Yes."

He must certainly have walked over six miles. The whispering seemed to render them intimate in spite of her aggrieved attitude towards him. It struck her as strange and affecting that she had once been his affianced sweetheart, that they used to kiss each other with long kisses, and that now they were nothing to each other. . . . She made a sign for him to enter. She very gently and cautiously closed the door.

"I'm on the top floor now," she murmured, scarcely audible.

He nodded. The fan-light over the door let through the ray of the street-lamp, so that the first flight of stairs was fairly plain. The higher flights were dark. But Ned knew the staircase. Ned followed her on tiptoe, and every now and then a stair creaked with a thunderous sound that no prudence of tread could avoid. Elaine had the horrid illusion that behind every door as they passed it women with slanderous tongues were greedily listening.

At the summit of the perilous climb she led him into the kitchen-scullery-dining-room, and found the matches, lit the gas, lit the gas-stove. She put her fingers to her lips. They must still exist and communicate without sound. No sound-proof floors in that house! She motioned him to the wicker easy-chair. He sank into it. She looked at him and looked round the room. Happily the room was very tidy and cosy. He was pale, pathetic, with his pointed, exhausted, weak-charactered features. He wore a blue Burberry, strapped close at the waist and bulging out above and below, over his evening clothes. In his hand he held an ordinary bowler hat.

No style! What a contrast with Mr. Lyeskov! He had the air of defeat, even of being a prisoner-of-war. And he had walked more than six miles in his madness. Without a word she turned away, lit the gas-ring, and began to make some tea. She had to do it from simple humanity. And there she was with him, sharing surreptitiously the room with him, in night-dress, peignoir and slippers. And their tender intimacy emerged towards them out of the past, indestructible. Somehow, what had been still was. How could she treat him as a stranger? She could not. Moreover, she felt far superior to him in moral force; she felt, despite her resentment, almost protective in a casual condescending way. She had the adoration of Carly Lyeskov at her back.

"Well?" she whispered.

Ned gazed at the rug under his feet. Silence. Hiss of the gas-stove; hiss of the gas-ring; fizzing of the blue-yellow gas-jet within its mantle!

"Well, how's Alice?" she whisperingly questioned, in a rather indifferent, half-quizzing tone, as if saying: "Well, you got your Alice. How does it work now you've had her six years?"

He whispered solemnly:

"Poor Alice died two years ago, and the baby's two years old. Hadn't you heard?"

She shook her head. She could not

speak; her throat was suddenly constricted; tears glittered in her eyes. At length:

"I'm sorry to hear it." How poor the words! Then after a pause, while Ned stared at the inside of his hat: "Is it a girl or a boy?"

"A girl."

"What have you called her?"

"Alice."

"And how do you manage about the poor little thing?"

"Ah! That's the trouble. How *do* I manage?" He looked up suddenly, and he was crying.

"Ellie"—nobody else had ever called her "Ellie"—"Ellie, I made a frightful mistake when I broke it off with you, and I've known it for years. And then when I saw you to-night. . . . It was too much for me. Yes. I had to talk to you." His whispered utterance was so obscure and feeble that she had to guess what he said; but she guessed right. The water boiled. She turned from him again to fill the teapot.

How weak he was! So impulsive! But so enterprising, too! Full of initiative as usual! He had had the wild idea of coming to her and he had come. He had arrived. He had wanted to talk to her, and he was talking to her.

"And how's business?" she asked, extinguishing the gas-ring. She was bound to say something—and something ordinary, banal, off the point.

"Oh, pretty fair," he whispered. "Not bad. Changeable, of course. But you rub along, you know."

She was confirmed in her notion that he was out of luck. He drank the hot tea, which seemed to revive him—he was a man easy to revive and easy to deject. She took some tea herself. As an after-thought she cut some bread-and-butter; she gave him a slice with her hand, as there was no plate save the wooden bread-platter. He ate it savagely, and several more slices. The scene was domestic. The night, the enforced whispering, his trouble, her peignoir, the informality of the little meal, made it domestic. She stood near the fire in order to keep warm in her thin raiment.

"Ellie," he said, rising vivaciously to put his cup and saucer on the table, and standing near to her, "I've always been in love with you. I know there's no excuse for me. I didn't treat you right. But there it is. And when I saw you to-night——" He had raised his voice.

"H'sh!" she warned him.

She spoke gently, keeping resentment out of her voice, partly because she was flattered by the realisation of her power over him (and she had the same power over Carly Lyeskov), and partly because he was so wistful and she pitied him in his unhappiness. Nevertheless in her heart she was indignant. And she thought of her independence, of the stability of her position as a self-maintained woman beholden to none. She did not see Elaine Edar abandoning her independent situation for the status of the wife of a Ned Haltright, asking a Ned Haltright for money when she needed it, considering his wishes in regard to her own conduct, sacrificing herself to the baby of the girl who had supplanted her, sharing the material vicissitudes which must inevitably result from his character. He might love her, admire her, but that could not compensate. Moreover, the whole idea was absurd, monstrous. His suggestion amounted to effrontery. And Carly Lyeskov existed and worshipped. However, she offered no reasoned reply. Her daily traffic with all sorts of human beings had taught her when to argue and when not to argue.

"Please don't say any more," she murmured firmly. "You can't burst out like this."

"But I've had it on my mind for years, I tell you."

"Please don't say any more."

He seemed to wither.

"I'll go. Better go. Sorry I spoke."

The wicker easy-chair, empty, complained with creakings of the burden which it had had to bear. The dawn began delicately to announce itself in silver-grey gleams through the interstice between the curtains of the window.

"You mustn't go yet," Elaine whispered.

"Why not?"

"Because it's getting light, and the people on the first floor will be about, and I can't have a man, especially in evening-dress, leaving my rooms at this time. Besides, there's no buses or trams yet. You must wait till everyone's up and people have begun to go up and down stairs, and you must cover up your shirt-front properly. Then you can slip out." She whispered soberly, with the sagacity of a young woman who has learnt her world. She added: "I shall lie down. I'm frightfully tired, and you must be, as well. Try to sleep in the chair." She left him for the front room, and locked

the door, and dropped on to her bed. She was indeed exhausted, but she could not sleep. Her eyes burned. She reflected that dancers were still dancing at the Fantasy. Then she slept.

## IV

WHEN she woke the alarm-clock (which never alarmed) showed the hour of ten. The memory of the night gradually re-established itself in her mind. How fortunate that her charwoman came only at eleven-thirty! She thought gladly: "Yesterday it was the day after to-morrow that I was to see Carly. Now it is to-morrow. Tea at the Regent Palace at five." It was she who had chosen the Regent Palace. She arose, washed, dressed deliberately, gave particular attention to the toilette of her face. Cautiously she unlocked her door and cautiously went into the back room. Ned was fast asleep, in a twisted, uncomfortable posture in the wicker-chair. His pallid face had the pathos of a corpse. He appeared tragically defenceless, so much so that she could have cried at the sight of him and at the thought of his weaknesses, his perils, his incompetency to deal with the responsibilities attached to little Alice the baby. Much gas had been burned, but she did not care. She drew the curtains back and the entire room became pathetic—the tea-cups, the teapot, crumbs on the floor. The image of Carly Lyeskov was obscured in her soul. She turned off the gas-jet. Ned awoke with a jump.

"You're all dressed. Shall I go now?"

"Where's little Alice?"

"She's with some people in Canonbury."

"Who are they? Relations?"

"No. Not relations. I'm not strong in relations. *You* know that. I think they're very decent people. She seems to be pretty well looked after."

"Oh, Ned! You must give me the address. I'll go and see her to-morrow morning. I'll have a look at things a bit."

The images of Carly Lyeskov, automobiles, luxury, distinction, worship, adoration, passion, eternal romance, began to slip away from her. She clutched at them, drew them back, held them fast, hugged them, but the next moment they were wriggling away again like eels.

"Oh, Ellie! There's nobody like you, and there never was. You're an angel and nothing else."

She wept. She let the tears fall—drop, drop; they slipped down her cheeks and fell into space. Perhaps she was sorry as much for herself as for little Alice and little Alice's father. She saw vistas of effort, struggle, reverses, obstinate recommencings, narrownesses, dependence, despairs, fluttering hopes, quarrels, reconciliations, disillusions, and illusions. People would cease to stare at her in the streets of the West End because she would never be in the West End. She would be withdrawn from the vast world of pleasure and excitement and electricity, where tinted statues of nymphs supported heavily carved ceilings on their frail shoulders. Yet an immense peace took possession of her disturbed soul and stilled it.

"This is my fate," she thought. "I was born for it. I wasn't really born for the other thing."

The immense peace in her was warmed and lighted with tenderness, and by the memory of far-off kisses. It was a strange sort of happiness, austere, purposeful, braced; but she was happy. She smiled kindly. Ned advanced towards her. She lifted her chin and stopped him. Did he suppose that things were as simple as all that, that the virgin fortress would yield like that at the first summons of the trumpet? Her smile changed to a look of self-possession and extreme gravity.

"Meet me this afternoon for tea at the Regent Palace, will you?" she said. "After the matinee. Then you can tell me just how matters stand."

And Carly Lyeskov went back to his Paris.

# *Oriental Scenes*

## An Arabian Desert Village

IT was late in the afternoon when we came forth, and as I looked down over the plain of Gofar, the oasis greenness of palms lay a little before us. The sun was setting, and Naor showed me the two-horned basalt mountain, Samrâ Hâyil, which stands a little behind the village capital, upon the northward. Gofar, written Káfar, and in the mouth of the nomads Jiffar, lies, like Môgug, enclosed by orchard walling from the desert. In the plain before the town, I read the altitude 4,300 feet. We entered by a broad empty way, between long walls, where we saw no one, nor the houses of the place. It was sunset, when the Arabian villagers go in to their suppers. There met us only a woman—loathly to look upon! for the feminine face was blotted out by the sordid veil-clout; in our eyes, an heathenish Asiatic villainy! and the gentle-blooded Arabian race, in the matter of the harem, are become churls. Beginning at Káfar, all their women's faces, which God created for the cheerfulness of the human world, are turned to this jealous horror, and there is nothing seen of their wimpled wives, in sorry garments, but the hands!

Charles M. Doughty.

IN Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

## A Donkey Ride in Cairo

THE usual mode of moving from place to place in the city of Cairo is upon donkeys; of these great number are always in readiness with donkey-boys attached. I had two who constantly (until one of them died with the Plague) waited at my door upon the chance of being wanted. I found this way of moving about exceedingly pleasant, and never attempted any other. I had only to mount my beast, and tell my donkey-boy the point for which I was bound, and instantly I began to glide on at a capital pace. The streets of Cairo are not paved in any way, but strewed with a dry sandy soil so deadening to sound, that the footfall of my donkey could scarcely be heard. There is no trottoir, and as you ride through the streets, you mingle with the people on foot: those who are in your way upon being warned by the shouts of the donkey-boy move very slightly aside so as to leave you a narrow lane for your passage. Through this you move at a gallop, gliding on delightfully in the very midst of crowds without being inconvenienced or stopped for a moment; it seems to you that it is not the donkey, but the donkey-boy who wafts you along with his shouts through pleasant groups and air that comes thick with the fragrance of burial spice. "Eh! Sheik, Eh! Bint—reggalek—shumalek, &c., &c.—O old man, O virgin, get out of the way on the right—O virgin, O old man, get out of the way on the left—this Englishman comes, he comes, he comes!"

A. W. Kinglake.

## A Japanese "Lady Into Fox"

PRINCE ABINO JASSIMA was in the Temple of Inari, who, being the god and protector of foxes ought to have a temple wherever foxes are preserved. A party of courtiers fox-hunting at this time were in full cry after a young fox, when the poor creature ran into the temple, and instead of looking for protection to the god Inari, took shelter in Prince Jassima's bosom. The Prince on this occasion behaved very well, and the fox-hunters very ill, as it may be feared most fox-hunters would do in similar circumstances. They insisted upon his turning the fox out; he protested that he would commit no such crime, for a crime it would have been in such a case; they attempted to take the creature by force, and Prince Jassima behaved so bravely that he beat them all, and set the fox at liberty . . . I pass over the historical consequences which make "the hunting of that day" more important in Japanese history, than that of Chevy Chase is in our own. Suffice it to say that King Jassima, as he must now be called, revenged his father's murder upon these very hunters, and succeeded to his throne; and then, after his victory the fox appeared, no longer in vulpine form, but in the shape of a lady of incomparable beauty, whom he took to wife, and by whom he became the father of our Astrologer, Abino Seimer. Gratitude had moved this alopegyne, gynalopex, fox-lady, or lady-fox, to love; she told her love indeed—but she never told her gratitude; nor did King Jassima know, nor could he possibly suspect, that this lovely bride had been that very fox whose life he had with so much generosity and courage preserved; never did he imagine, nor never could be have imagined this, till an extraordinary change took place in his beautiful and beloved wife. Her ears, her nose, her claws and her tail began to grow, and by degrees this wonderful creature became a fox again!

Robert Southey.

CLEAR shine the hills; the rice-fields round
Two cranes are circling; sleepy and slow,
A blue canal the lake's blue bound
Breaks at the bamboo bridge; and lo!
Touched with the sundown's spirit and glow,
I see you turn, with flirted fan,
Against the plum-tree's bloomy snow . . .
I loved you once in old Japan!

W. E. Henley.

## Royal Nuptials at Kashmir

THE day of Lalla Rookh's departure from Delhi was as splendid as sunshine and pageantry could make it. The bazaars and baths were all covered with the richest tapestry. Hundreds of gilded barges upon the Jumna floated with their banners shining in the water; while through the streets groups of beautiful children went strewing the most delicious flowers around, as in that Persian festival called the Scattering of the Roses; till every part of the city was as fragrant as if a caravan of musk from Khoten has passed through it. The Princess, having taken leave of her kind father, who at parting hung a cornelian of Yemen round her neck, on which was inscribed a verse from the Koran, and having sent a considerable present to the Fakirs, who kept up the Perpetual Lamp in her sister's tomb, meekly ascended the palankeen prepared for her; and, while Anrungzebe stood to take a last look from his balcony, the procession moved slowly on the road to Lahore.

Thomas Moore.

## The Horrors of the Black Hole

THE English captives were left to the mercy of the guards, and the guards determined to secure them for the night in the prison of the garrison, a chamber known by the fearful name of the Black Hole. Even for a single European malefactor, that dungeon would, in such a climate, have been too close and narrow. The space was only twenty feet square. The air holes were small and obstructed. It was the summer solstice, the season when the fierce heat of Bengal can scarcely be rendered tolerable to natives of England by lofty halls and by the constant waving of fans. The number of the prisoners was one hundred and forty-six . . . They cried for mercy. They strove to burst the door. Holwell who, even in that extremity, retained some presence of mind, offered large bribes to the gaolers. But the answer was that nothing could be done without the Nabob's orders, that the Nabob was asleep, and that he would be angry if anybody woke him. Then the prisoners went mad with despair. They trampled each other down, fought for the places at the windows, fought for the pittance of water with which the cruel mercy of the murderers mocked their agonies, raved, prayed, blasphemed, implored the guards to fire among them. The gaolers in the meantime held lights to the bars, and shouted with laughter at the frantic struggles of their victims.

At length the tumult died away in low gaspings and moanings. The day broke. The Nabob had slept off his debauch, and permitted the door to be opened. But it was some time before the soldiers could make a lane for the survivors by piling up on each side the heaps of corpses on which the burning climate had already begun to do its loathsome work. When at length a passage was made, twenty-three ghastly figures, such as their own mothers would not have known, staggered one by one out of the charnel-house. A pit was instantly dug. The dead bodies, a hundred and twenty-three in number, were flung into it promiscuously and covered up. LORD MACAULAY.

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## Day and Night Under Syrian Skies

THE camels and soldiers, the bazaars and khans, the fountains and awnings, which chequer, with such variety of light and shade, the alleys and markets of an Oriental town, are to be seen in Beyrout in perfection ; and an artist might employ himself here for months with advantage and pleasure. A new costume was here added to the motley and picturesque assembly of dresses. This was the dress of the blue-veiled women from the Lebanon, stalking solemnly through the markets, with huge horns, near a yard high, on their foreheads. For thousands of years, since the time the Hebrew prophets wrote, these horns have been exalted in the Lebanon . . .

We went out through the arched towering gateway of the town [Jaffa] into the plain beyond, and that was another famous and brilliant scene of the " Arabian Nights." The heavens shone with a marvellous brilliancy—the plain disappeared far in the haze—the towers and battlements of the town rose black against the sky—old outlandish trees rose up here and there—clumps of camels were couched in the rare herbage—dogs were baying about—groups of men lay sleeping under their haicks round about—round about the tall gates many lights were twinkling—and they brought us water-pipes and sherbet—and we wondered to think London was only three weeks off. WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY.

## A Miracle of Rare Device

NORTH-EASTWARD is the city Ciandu, which the Great Khan Kublay now reigning built, erecting therein a marvellous palace of marble and other stones, which extends to the wall on the one side, and the middle of the city on the other. He included sixteen miles within the circuit of the wall on that side where the palace joins the city wall, into which none can enter but by the palace . . In the midst of a fair wood he hath built a royal house on pillars gilded and varnished, on every one of which is a dragon all gilt, which winds his tail about the pillar, with his head bearing up the roof, as also with his wings displayed on both sides; the cover is also of reeds gilt and varnished so that the rain can do it no injury, the reeds being three handfuls thick and ten yards long, split from knot to knot; the house itself also may be pulled in pieces and taken down like a tent, and erected again, for it is sustained when it is set up with two hundred silken cords.

MARCO POLO.

THEN stole I up, and trancedly
Gazed on the Persian girl alone,
Serene with argent-lidded eyes
Amorous, and lashes like to rays
Of darkness, and a brow of pearl
Tressed with redolent ebony,
In many a dark delicious curl,
Flowing beneath her rose-hued zone;
The sweetest lady of the time,
Well worthy of the golden prime
Of good Haroun Al Raschid.

LORD TENNYSON.

## A Youthful Bedouin

THE child of the desert was beautiful indeed in his long blue robe, confined at the waist by a leather thong passed half-a-score of times round his body. His thick brown hair, shaded his face, and fell in curls upon his neck from under his hood. His eyes sparkled with a softer light than the planets that twinkle in the heavens, as, holding in his hand a shining lance, wound round with silver thread, he walked slowly, with the grace of a child and the dignity of a man, speaking only when necessary and never laughing. When he returned from the pasture, carrying the young lambs in the skirt of his robe, while the sheep followed him bleating and rubbing their heads against his hand, the shepherds, his companions, stopped to see him pass, and he seemed like Joseph adored by the eleven stars. And at evening, when he raised the stone from the common well with a strength above his age and watered the flocks, the women forgot to fill their pitchers, and cried, " He is as handsome as his father ! " to which the men responded " And he will also be as brave."

EDOUARD LABOULAYE.

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# The Sire de Maletroit's Door

## *A Cavalier's Romantic Adventure in Old France*

### By R. L. STEVENSON

DENIS DE BEAULIEU was not yet two-and-twenty, but he counted himself a grown man, and a very accomplished cavalier into the bargain. Lads were early formed in that rough, warfaring epoch; and when one has been in a pitched battle and a dozen raids, has killed one's man in an honourable fashion, and knows a thing or two of strategy and mankind, a certain swagger in the gait is surely to be pardoned. He had put up his horse with due care, and supped with due deliberation; and then, in a very agreeable frame of mind, went out to pay a visit in the grey of the evening. It was not a very wise proceeding on the young man's part. He would have done better to remain beside the fire or go decently to bed. For the town was full of the troops of Burgundy and England under a mixed command; and though Denis was there on safe-conduct, his safe-conduct was like to serve him little on a chance encounter.

It was September, 1429; the weather had fallen sharp; a flighty piping wind, laden with showers, beat about the township; and the dead leaves ran riot along the streets. Here and there a window was already lighted up, and the noise of men-at-arms making merry over supper within came forth in fits and was swallowed up and carried away by the wind. The night fell swiftly; the flag of England, fluttering on the spire-top, grew ever fainter and fainter against the flying clouds—a black speck like a swallow in the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the sky. As the night fell the wind rose, and began to hoot under archways and roar amid the tree-tops in the valley below the town.

Denis de Beaulieu walked fast and was soon knocking at his friend's door; but though he promised himself to stay only a little while and make an early return, his welcome was so pleasant, and he found so much to delay him, that it was already long past midnight before he said good-bye upon the threshold. The wind had fallen again in the meanwhile; the night was as black as the grave; not a star, nor a glimmer of moonshine, slipped through the canopy of cloud. Denis was ill-acquainted with the intricate lanes of Château Landon; even by daylight he had found some trouble in picking his way; and in this absolute darkness he soon lost it altogether. He was certain of one thing only—to keep mounting the hill; for his friend's house lay at the lower end, or tail, of Château Landon, while the inn was up at the head, under the great church spire. With this clue to go upon he stumbled and groped forward, now breathing more freely in open places where there was a good slice of sky overhead, now feeling along the wall in stifling closes. It is an eerie and mysterious position to be thus submerged in opaque blackness in an almost unknown town. The silence is terrifying in its possibilities. The touch of cold window bars to the exploring hand startles the man like the touch of a toad; the inequalities of the pavement shake his heart into his mouth; a piece of denser darkness threatens an ambuscade or a chasm in the pathway; and where the air is brighter, the houses put on strange and bewildering appearances, as if to lead him farther from his way. For Denis, who had to regain his without attracting notice, there was real danger as well as mere discomfort in the walk; and he went warily and boldly at once, and at every corner paused to make an observation.

He had been for some time threading a lane so narrow that he could touch a wall with either hand, when it began to open out and go sharply downward. Plainly this lay no longer in the direction of his inn; but the hope of a little more light tempted him forward to reconnoitre. The lane ended in a terrace with a bartizan wall, which gave an outlook between high houses, as out of an embrasure, into the valley lying dark and formless several hundred feet below. Denis looked down, and could discern a few tree-tops waving and a single speck of

brightness where the river ran across a weir. The weather was clearing up, and the sky had lightened, so as to show the outline of the heavier clouds and the dark margin of the hills. By the uncertain glimmer, the house on his left hand should be a place of some pretensions; it was surmounted by several pinnacles and turret-tops; the round stern of a chapel, with a fringe of flying buttresses, projected boldly from the main block; and the door was sheltered under a deep porch carved with figures and overhung by two long gargoyles. The windows of the chapel gleamed through their intricate tracery with a light as of many tapers, and threw out the buttresses and the peaked roof in a more intense blackness against the sky. It was plainly the hôtel of some great family of the neighbourhood; and as it reminded Denis of a town house of his own at Bourges, he stood for some time gazing up at it and mentally gauging the skill of the architects and the consideration of the two families.

There seemed to be no issue to the terrace but the lane by which he had reached it; he could only retrace his steps, but he had gained some notion of his whereabouts, and hoped by this means to hit the main thoroughfare and speedily regain the inn. He was reckoning without that chapter of accidents which was to make this night memorable above all others in his career; for he had not gone back above a hundred yards before he saw a light coming to meet him, and heard loud voices speaking together in the echoing narrows of the lane. It was a party of men-at-arms going the night round with torches. Denis assured himself that they had all been making free with the wine-bowl, and were in no mood to be particular about safe-conducts or the niceties of chivalrous war. It was as like as not that they would kill him like a dog and leave him where he fell. The situation was inspiriting but nervous. Their own torches would conceal him from sight, he reflected; and he hoped that they would drown the noise of his footsteps with their own empty voices. If he were but fleet and silent, he might evade their notice altogether.

Unfortunately, as he turned to beat a retreat, his foot rolled upon a pebble, he fell against the wall with an ejaculation, and his sword rang loudly on the stones. Two or three voices demanded who went there—some in French, some in English; but Denis made no reply, and ran the faster down the lane. Once upon the terrace, he paused to look back. They still kept calling after him, and just then began to double the pace in pursuit, with a considerable clank of armour, and great tossing of the torchlight to and fro in the narrow jaws of the passage.

Denis cast a look around and darted into the porch. There he might escape observation, or—if that were too much to expect—was in a capital posture whether for parley or defence. So thinking, he drew his sword and tried to set his back against the door. To his surprise, it yielded behind his weight; and though he turned in a moment, continued to swing back on oiled and noiseless hunges, until it stood wide open on a black interior. When things fall out opportunely for the person concerned, he is not apt to be critical about the how or why, his own immediate personal convenience seeming a sufficient reason for the strangest oddities and revolutions in our sublunary things; and so Denis, without a moment's hesitation, stepped within and partly closed the door behind him to conceal his place of refuge. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to close it altogether; but for some inexplicable reason—perhaps by a spring or a weight—the ponderous mass of oak whipped itself out of his fingers and clanked to, with a formidable rumble and a noise like the falling of an automatic bar.

The round, at that very moment, debouched upon the terrace and proceeded to summon him with shouts and curses. He heard them ferreting in the dark corners; and the stock of a lance even rattled along the outer surface of the door behind which he stood; but these gentlemen were in too high a humour to be long delayed, and soon made off down a corkscrew pathway which had escaped Denis's observation, and passed out of sight and hearing along the battlements of the town.

Denis breathed again. He gave them a few minutes' grace for fear of accidents, and then groped about for some means of opening the door and slipping forth again. The inner surface was quite smooth, not a handle, not a moulding, not a projection of any sort. He got his finger-nails round the edges and pulled, but the mass was immovable. He shook it, it was as firm as a rock. Denis de Beaulieu frowned and gave vent to a little noiseless whistle. What ailed the door? he wondered. Why was it open? How came it to shut so easily

and so effectually after him? There was something obscure and underhand about all this that was little to the young man's fancy. It looked like a snare; and yet who could suppose a snare in such a quiet by-street and in a house of so prosperous and even noble an exterior? And yet—snare or no snare, intentionally or unintentionally — here he was, prettily trapped; and for the life of him he could see no way out of it again. The darkness began to weigh upon him. He gave ear; all was silent without, but within and close by he seemed to catch a faint sighing, a faint sobbing rustle, a little stealthy creak—as though many persons were at his side, holding themselves quite still, and governing even their respiration with the extreme of slyness. The idea went to his vitals with a shock, and he faced about suddenly as if to defend his life. Then, for the first time, he became aware of a light about the level of his eyes and at some distance in the interior of the house—a vertical thread of light, widening towards the bottom, such as might escape between two wings of arras over a doorway. To see anything was a relief to Denis; it was like a piece of solid ground to a man labouring in a morass; his mind seized upon it with avidity; and he stood staring at it and trying to piece together some logical conception of his surroundings. Plainly there was a flight of steps ascending from his own level to that of this illuminated doorway; and indeed he thought he could make out another thread of light, as fine as a needle and as faint as phosphorescence, which might very well be reflected along the polished wood of a handrail. Since he had begun to suspect that he was not alone, his heart had continued to beat with smothering violence, and an intolerable desire for action of any sort had possessed itself of his spirit.

He was in deadly peril, he believed. What could be more natural than to mount the staircase, lift the curtain, and confront his difficulty at once? At least he would be dealing with something tangible; at least he would be no longer in the dark. He stepped slowly forward with outstretched hands, until his foot struck the bottom step; then he rapidly scaled the stairs, stood for a moment to compose his expression, lifted the arras and went in.

He found himself in a large apartment of polished stone. There were three doors; one on each of three sides; all similarly curtained with tapestry. The fourth side was occupied by two large windows and a great stone chimney-piece, carved with the arms of the Malétroits. Denis recognised the bearings, and was gratified to find himself in such good hands. The room was strongly illuminated; but it contained little furniture except a heavy table and a chair or two, the hearth was innocent of fire, and the pavement was but sparsely strewn with rushes clearly many days old.

¶

ON a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Denis as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast; not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar; something equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal, and dangerous. The upper lip was inordinately full, as though swollen by a blow or a toothache; and the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small, strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all round his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and moustache were the pink of venerable sweetness. Age, probably in consequence of inordinate precautions, had left no mark upon his hands; and the Malétroit hand was famous. It would be difficult to imagine anything at once so fleshy and so delicate in design; the taper, sensual fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women; the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed; the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead, surprising whiteness. It rendered his aspect tenfold more redoubtable, that a man with hands like these should keep them devoutly folded in his lap like a virgin martyr—that a man with so intense and startling an expression of face should sit patiently on his seat and contemplate people with an unwinking stare, like a god, or a god's statue. His quiescence seemed ironical and treacherous, it fitted so poorly with his looks.

Such was Alain, Sire de Malétroit.

Denis and he looked silently at each other for a second or two.

" Pray step in," said the Sire de Malétroit. " I have been expecting you all the evening."

He had not risen, but he accompanied his words with a smile, and a slight but courteous inclination of the head. Partly from the smile, partly from the strange musical murmur with which the Sire prefaced his observation, Denis felt a strong shudder of disgust go through his marrow. And what with disgust and honest confusion of mind, he could scarcely get words together in reply.

" I fear," he said, " that this is a double accident. I am not the person you suppose me. It seems you were looking for a visit; but for my part, nothing was further from my thoughts—nothing could be more contrary to my wishes—than this intrusion."

" Well, well," replied the old gentleman indulgently, " here you are, which is the main point. Seat yourself, my friend, and put yourself entirely at your ease. We shall arrange our little affairs presently."

Denis perceived that the matter was still complicated with some misconception, and he hastened to continue his explanations.

" Your door . . ." he began.

" About my door? " asked the other, raising his peaked eyebrows. " A little piece of ingenuity." And he shrugged his shoulders. " A hospitable fancy! By your own account, you were not desirous of making my acquaintance. We old people look for such reluctance now and then; and when it touches our honour, we cast about until we find some way of overcoming it. You arrive uninvited, but believe me, very welcome."

" You persist in error, sir," said Denis. " There can be no question between you and me. I am a stranger in this country-side. My name is Denis, damoiseau de Beaulieu. If you see me in your house, it is only——"

" My young friend," interrupted the other, " you will permit me to have my own ideas on that subject. They probably differ from yours at the present moment," he added with a leer, " but time will show which of us is in the right."

Denis was convinced he had to do with a lunatic. He seated himself with a shrug, content to wait the upshot; and a pause ensued, during which he thought he could distinguish a hurried gabbling as of prayer from behind the arras immediately opposite him. Sometimes there seemed to be but one person engaged, sometimes two; and the vehemence of the voice, low as it was, seemed to indicate either great haste or an agony of spirit. It occurred to him that this piece of tapestry covered the entrance to the chapel he had noticed from without.

The old gentleman meanwhile surveyed Denis from head to foot with a smile, and from time to time emitted little noises like a bird or a mouse, which seemed to indicate a high degree of satisfaction. This state of matters became rapidly insupportable; and Denis, to put an end to it, remarked politely that the wind had gone down.

The old gentleman fell into a fit of silent laughter, so prolonged and violent that he became quite red in the face. Denis got upon his feet at once, and put on his hat with a flourish.

" Sir," he said, " if you are in your wits, you have affronted me grossly. If you are out of them, I flatter myself I can find better employment for my brains than to talk with lunatics. My conscience is clear; you have made a fool of me from the first moment; you have refused to hear my explanations; and now there is no power under God will make me stay here any longer; and if I cannot make my way out in a more decent fashion, I will hack your door in pieces with my sword."

The Sire de Malétroit raised his right hand and wagged it at Denis with the fore and little fingers extended.

" My dear nephew," he said, " sit down."

" Nephew! " retorted Denis, " you lie in your throat; " and he snapped his fingers in his face.

" Sit down, you rogue! " cried the old gentleman, in a sudden, harsh voice, like the barking of a dog. " Do you fancy," he went on, " that when I had made my little contrivance for the door I had stopped short with that? If you prefer to be bound hand and foot till your bones ache, rise and try to go away. If you choose to remain a free young buck, agreeably conversing with an old gentleman—why, sit where you are in peace, and God be with you."

" Do you mean I am a prisoner? " demanded Denis.

" I state the facts," replied the other. " I would rather leave the conclusion to yourself."

Denis sat down again. Externally he managed to keep pretty calm; but within, he was now boiling with anger, now chilled with apprehension. He no longer felt

convinced that he was dealing with a madman. And if the old gentleman was sane, what, in God's name, had he to look for? What absurd or tragical adventure had befallen him? What countenance was he to assume?

While he was thus unpleasantly reflecting, the arras that overhung the chapel door was raised, and a tall priest in his robes came forth and, giving a long, keen stare at Denis, said something in an undertone to Sire de Malétroit.

"She is in a better frame of spirit?" asked the latter.

"She is more resigned, messire," replied the priest.

"Now the Lord help her, she is hard to please!" sneered the old gentleman. "A likely stripling—not ill-born—and of her own choosing, too? Why, what more would the jade have?"

"The situation is not usual for a young damsel," said the other, "and somewhat trying to her blushes."

"She should have thought of that before she began the dance? It was none of my choosing, God knows that: but since she is in it, by our Lady, she shall carry it to the end." And then addressing Denis, "Monsieur de Beaulieu," he asked, "may I present you to my niece? She has been waiting your arrival, I may say, with even greater impatience than myself."

Denis had resigned himself with a good grace—all he desired was to know the worst of it as speedily as possible; so he rose at once, and bowed in acquiescence. The Sire de Malétroit followed his example and limped, with the assistance of the chaplain's arm, towards the chapel door. The priest pulled aside the arras, and all three entered. The building had considerable architectural pretensions. A light groining sprang from six stout columns, and hung down in two rich pendants from the centre of the vault. The place terminated behind the altar in a round end, embossed and honeycombed with a superfluity of ornament in relief, and pierced by many little windows shaped like stars, trefoils, or wheels. These windows were imperfectly glazed, so that the night air circulated freely in the chapel. The tapers, of which there must have been half a hundred burning on the altar, were unmercifully blown about; and the light went through many different phases of brilliancy and semi-eclipse. On the steps in front of the altar knelt a young girl richly attired as a bride. A chill settled over Denis as he observed her costume; he fought with desperate energy against the conclusion that was being thrust upon his mind; it could not—it should not—be as he feared.

"Blanche," said the Sire, in his most flute-like tones, "I have brought a friend to see you, my little girl; turn round and give him your pretty hand. It is good to be devout; but it is necessary to be polite my niece."

¶

THE girl rose to her feet and turned towards the newcomers. She moved all of a piece; and shame and exhaustion were expressed in every line of her fresh young body; and she held her head down and kept her eyes upon the pavement, as she came slowly forward. In the course of her advance, her eyes fell upon Denis de Beaulieu's feet—feet of which he was justly vain, be it remarked, and wore in the most elegant accoutrement even while travelling. She paused—started, as if his yellow boots had conveyed some shocking meaning—and glanced suddenly up into the wearer's countenance. Their eyes met; shame gave place to horror and terror in her looks; the blood left her lips; with a piercing scream she covered her face with her hands and sank upon the chapel floor.

"That is not the man!" she cried. "My uncle; that is not the man!"

The Sire de Malétroit chirped agreeably. "Of course not," he said, "I expected as much. It was so unfortunate you could not remember his name."

"Indeed," she cried, "indeed, I have never seen this person till this moment—I have never so much as set eyes upon him—I never wish to see him again. Sir," she said, turning to Denis, "if you are a gentleman, you will bear me out. Have I ever seen you—have you ever seen me—before this accursed hour?"

"To speak for myself, I have never had that pleasure," answered the young man. "This is the first time, messire, that I have met with your engaging niece."

The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"I am distressed to hear it," he said. "But it is never too late to begin. I had little more acquaintance with my own late lady ere I married her; which proves," he added with a grimace, "that these impromptu marriages may often produce an excellent

understanding in the long-run. As the bridegroom is to have a voice in the matter, I will give him two hours to make up for lost time before we proceed with the ceremony." And he turned towards the door, followed by the clergyman.

The girl was on her feet in a moment. "My uncle, you cannot be in earnest," she said. "I declare before God I will stab myself rather than be forced on that young man. The heart rises at it; God forbids such marriages; you dishonour your white hair. Oh, my uncle, pity me! There is not a woman in all the world but would prefer death to such a nuptial. Is it possible," she added, faltering—"is it possible that you do not believe me—that you still think this"—and she pointed at Denis with a tremor of anger and contempt—"that you still think *this* to be the man?"

"Frankly," said the old gentleman, pausing on the threshold, "I do. But let me explain to you once for all, Blanche de Malétroit, my way of thinking about this affair. When you took it into your head to dishonour my family and the name that I have borne, in peace and war, for more than threescore years, you forfeited, not only the right to question my designs, but that of looking me in the face. If your father had been alive, he would have spat on you and turned you out of doors. His was the hand of iron. You may bless your God you have only to deal with the hand of velvet, mademoiselle. It was my duty to get you married without delay. Out of pure goodwill, I have tried to find your own gallant for you. And I believe I have succeeded. But before God and all the holy angels, Blanche de Malétroit, if I have not, I care not one jack-straw. So let me recommend you to be polite to our young friend; for upon my word, your next groom may be less appetising."

And with that he went out, with the chaplain at his heels; and the arras fell behind the pair.

The girl turned upon Denis with flashing eyes.

"And what, sir," she demanded, "may be the meaning of all this?"

"God knows," returned Denis gloomily. "I am a prisoner in this house, which seems full of mad people. More I know not; and nothing do I understand."

"And pray how came you here?" she asked.

He told her as briefly as he could. "For the rest," he added, "perhaps you will follow my example, and tell me the answer to all these riddles, and what, in God's name, is like to be the end of it."

She stood silent for a little, and he could see her lips tremble and her tearless eyes burn with a feverish lustre. Then she pressed her forehead in both hands.

"Alas, how my head aches!" she said wearily—"to say nothing of my poor heart! But it is due to you to know my story, unmaidenly as it must seem. I am called Blanche de Malétroit: I have been without father or mother for—oh! for as long as I can recollect, and indeed I have been most unhappy all my life. Three months ago a young captain began to stand near me every day in church. I could see that I pleased him; I am much to blame, but I was so glad that any one should love me; and when he passed me a letter, I took it home with me and read it with great pleasure. Since that time he was written many. He was so anxious to speak with me, poor fellow! and kept asking me to leave the door open some evening that we might have two words upon the stair. For he knew how much my uncle trusted me." She gave something like a sob at that, and it was a moment before she could go on. "My uncle is a hard man, but he is very shrewd," she said at last. "He has performed many feats in war, and was a great person at court, and much trusted by Queen Isabeau in old days. How he came to suspect me I cannot tell; but it is hard to keep anything from his knowledge; and this morning, as we came from mass, he took my hand in his, forced it open, and read my little billet, walking by my side all the while. When he had finished, he gave it back to me with great politeness. It contained another request to have the door left open; and this has been the ruin of us all. My uncle kept me strictly in my room until evening, and then ordered me to dress myself as you see me—a hard mockery for a young girl; do you not think so? I suppose, when he could not prevail with me to tell him the young captain's name, he must have laid a trap for him: into which, alas! you have fallen in the anger of God. I looked for much confusion; for how could I tell whether he was willing to take me for his wife on these sharp terms? He might have been trifling with me from the first; or I might have made myself too cheap in his eyes. But truly I had not looked for such a shameful

punishment as this! I could not think that God would let a girl be so disgraced before a young man. And now I have told you all; and I can scarcely hope that you will not despise me."

Denis made her a respectful inclination.

"Madam," he said, "you have honoured me by your confidence. It remains for me to prove that I am not unworthy of the honour. Is Messire de Malétroit at hand?"

"I believe he is writing in the salle without," she answered.

"May I lead you thither, madam?" asked Denis, offering his hand with his most courtly bearing.

She accepted it; and the pair passed out of the chapel, Blanche in a very drooping and shamefast condition, but Denis strutting and ruffling in the consciousness of a mission, and the boyish certainty of accomplishing it with honour.

The Sire de Malétroit rose to meet them with an ironical obeisance.

"Sir," said Denis, with the grandest possible air, "I believe I am to have some say in the matter of this marriage; and let me tell you at once, I will be no party to forcing the inclination of this young lady. Had it been freely offered to me, I should have been proud to accept her hand, for I perceive she is as good as she is beautiful; but as things are, I have now the honour, messire, of refusing."

Blanche looked at him with gratitude in her eyes; but the old gentleman only smiled and smiled, until his smile grew positively sickening to Denis.

"I am afraid," he said, "Monsieur de Beaulieu, that you do not perfectly understand the choice I have to offer you. Follow me, I beseech you, to this window." And he led the way to one of the large windows which stood open on the night. "You observe," he went on, "there is an iron ring in the upper masonry, and reeved through that a very efficacious rope. Now, mark my words: if you should find your disinclination to my niece's person insurmountable, I shall have you hanged out of this window before sunrise. I shall only proceed to such an extremity with the greatest regret, you may believe me. For it is not at all your death that I desire, but my niece's establishment in life. At the same time, it must come to that if you prove obstinate. Your family, Monsieur de Beaulieu, is very well in its way; but if you sprang from Charlemagne, you should not refuse the hand of a Malétroit with impunity—not if she had been as common as the Paris road—not if she were as hideous as the gargoyle over my door. Neither my niece nor you, nor my own private feelings, move me at all in this matter. The honour of my house has been compromised; I believe you to be the guilty person; at least you are now in the secret; and you can hardly wonder if I request you to wipe out the stain. If you will not, your blood be on your own head! It will be no great satisfaction to me to have your interesting relics kicking their heels in the breeze below my windows; but half a loaf is better than no bread, and if I cannot cure the dishonour, I shall at least stop the scandal."

There was a pause.

"I believe there are other ways of settling such imbroglios among gentlemen," said Denis. "You wear a sword, and I hear you have used it with distinction."

The Sire de Malétroit made a signal to the chaplain, who crossed the room with long silent strides and raised the arras over the third of the three doors. It was only a moment before he let it fall again; but Denis had time to see a dusky passage full of armed men.

"When I was a little younger, I should have been delighted to honour you, Monsieur de Beaulieu," said Sire Alain; "but I am now too old. Faithful retainers are the sinews of age, and I must employ the strength I have. This is one of the hardest things to swallow as a man grows up in years; but with a little patience, even this becomes habitual. You and the lady seem to prefer the salle for what remains of your two hours; and as I have no desire to cross your preference, I shall resign it to your use with all the pleasure in the world. No haste!" he added, holding up his hand, as he saw a dangerous look come into Denis de Beaulieu's face. "If your mind revolts against hanging, it will be time enough two hours hence to throw yourself out of the window or upon the pikes of my retainers. Two hours of life are always two hours. A great many things may turn up in even as little a while as that. And, besides, if I understand her appearance, my niece has still something to say to you. You will not disfigure your last hours by a want of politeness to a lady?"

Denis looked at Blanche, and she made him an imploring gesture.

It is likely that the old gentleman was

hugely pleased at this symptom of an understanding; for he smiled on both, and added sweetly: "If you will give me your word of honour, Monsieur de Beaulieu, to await my return at the end of the two hours before attempting anything desperate, I shall withdraw my retainers, and let you speak in greater privacy with mademoiselle."

Denis again glanced at the girl, who seemed to beseech him to agree.

"I give you my word of honour," he said.

Messire de Malétroit bowed, and proceeded to limp about the apartment, clearing his throat the while with that odd musical chirp which had already grown so irritating in the ears of Denis de Beaulieu. He first possessed himself of some papers which lay upon the table; then he went to the mouth of the passage and appeared to give an order to the men behind the arras; and lastly, he hobbled out through the door by which Denis had come in, turning upon the threshold to address a last smiling bow to the young couple, and followed by the chaplain with a hand-lamp.

¶

NO sooner were they alone than Blanche advanced towards Denis with her hands extended. Her face was flushed and excited, and her eyes shone with tears.

"You shall not die!" she cried, "you shall marry me after all."

"You seem to think, madam," replied Denis, "that I stand much in fear of death."

"Oh, no, no," she said. "I see you are no poltroon. It is for my own sake—I could not bear to have you slain for such a scruple."

"I am afraid," returned Denis, "that you underrate the difficulty, madam. What you may be too generous to refuse, I may be too proud to accept. In a moment of noble feeling towards me, you forgot what you perhaps owe to others."

He had the decency to keep his eyes upon the floor as he said this, and after he had finished, so as not to spy upon her confusion. She stood silent for a moment, then walked suddenly away, and falling on her uncle's chair, fairly burst out sobbing. Denis was in the acme of embarrassment. He looked round, as if to seek for inspiration, and seeing a stool, plumped down upon it for something to do. There he sat, playing with the guard of his rapier, and wishing himself dead a thousand times over, and buried in the nastiest kitchen-heap in France. His eyes wandered round the apartment, but found nothing to arrest them. There were such wide spaces between the furniture, the light fell so badly and cheerlessly over all, the dark outside air looked in so coldly through the windows, that he thought he had never seen a church so vast, nor a tomb so melancholy. The regular sobs of Blanche de Malétroit measured out the time like the ticking of a clock. He read the device upon the shield over and over again, until his eyes became obscured; he stared into shadowy corners until he imagined they were swarming with horrible animals; and every now and again he awoke with a start, to remember that his last two hours were running, and death was on the march.

Oftener and oftener, as the time went on, did his glance settle on the girl herself. Her face was bowed forward and covered with her hands, and she was shaken at intervals by the convulsive hiccup of grief. Even thus she was not an unpleasant object to dwell upon, so plump and yet so fine, with a warm brown skin, and the most beautiful hair, Denis thought, in the whole world of woman kind. Her hands were like her uncle's; but they were more in place at the end of her young arms, and looked infinitely soft and caressing. He remembered how her blue eyes had shone upon him, full of anger, pity, and innocence. And the more he dwelt on her perfections, the uglier death looked, and the more deeply was he smitten with penitence at her continued tears. Now he felt that no man could have the courage to leave a world which contained so beautiful a creature; and now he would have given forty minutes of his last hour to unsay this cruel speech.

Suddenly a hoarse and ragged peal of cockcrow rose to their ears from the dark valley below the windows. And this shattering noise in the silence of all around was like a light in a dark place, and shook them both out of their reflections.

"Alas, can I do nothing to help you?" she said, looking up.

"Madam," replied Denis, with a fine irrelevancy, "if I have said anything to wound you, believe me, it was for your own sake and not for mine."

She thanked him with a tearful look.

"I feel your position cruelly," he went on. "The world has been bitter hard on you. Your uncle is a disgrace to mankind.

Believe me, madam, there is no young gentleman in all France but would be glad of my opportunity, to die in doing you a momentary service."

"I know already that you can be very brave and generous," she answered. "What I *want* to know is whether I can serve you—now or afterwards," she added, with a quaver.

"Most certainly," he answered with a smile. "Let me sit beside you as if I were a friend, instead of a foolish intruder; try to forget how awkwardly we are placed to one another; make my last moments go pleasantly; and you will do me the chief service possible."

"You are very gallant," she added, with a yet deeper sadness . . . "very gallant . . . and it somehow pains me. But draw nearer, if you please; and if you find anything to say to me, you will at least make certain of a very friendly listener. Ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu," she broke forth—"ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu, how can I look you in the face?" And she fell to weeping again with a renewed effusion.

"Madam," said Denis, taking her hand in both of his, "reflect on the little time I have before me, and the great bitterness into which I am cast by the sight of your distress. Spare me, in my last moments, the spectacle of what I cannot cure even with the sacrifice of my life."

"I am very selfish," answered Blanche. "I will be braver, Monsieur de Beaulieu, for your sake. But think if I can do you no kindness in the future—if you have no friends to whom I could carry your adieux. Charge me as heavily as you can; every burden will lighten, by so little, the invaluable gratitude I owe you. Put it in my power to do something more for you than weep."

"My mother is married again, and has a young family to care for. My brother Guichard will inherit my fiefs; and if I am not in error, that will content him amply for my death. Life is a little vapour that passeth away, as we are told by those in holy orders. When a man is in a fair way and sees all life open in front of him, he seems to himself to make a very important figure in the world. His horse whinnies to him; the trumpets blow and the girls look out of window as he rides into town before his company; he receives many assurances of trust and regard—sometimes by express in a letter—sometimes face to face, with persons of great consequence falling on his neck. It is not wonderful if his head is turned for a time. But once he is dead, were he as brave as Hercules or as wise as Solomon, he is soon forgotten. It is not ten years since my father fell, with many other knights around him, in a very fierce encounter, and I do not think that any one of them, nor so much as the name of the fight, is now remembered. No, no, madam, the nearer you come to it, you see that death is a dark and dusty corner, where a man gets into his tomb and has the door shut after him till the Judgment Day. I have few friends just now, and once I am dead I shall have none."

"Ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu!" she exclaimed, "you forget Blanche de Malétroit."

"You have a sweet nature, madam, and you are pleased to estimate a little service far beyond its worth."

"It is not that," she answered. "You mistake me if you think I am so easily touched by my own concerns. I say so, because you are the noblest man I have ever met; because I recognise in you a spirit that would have made even a common person famous in the land."

"And yet here I die in a mousetrap—with no more noise about it than my own squeaking," answered he.

A look of pain crossed her face, and she was silent for a little while. Then a light came into her eyes, and with a smile she spoke again.

"I cannot have my champion think meanly of himself. Any one who gives his life for another will be met in Paradise by all the heralds and angels of the Lord God. And you have no such cause to hang your head. For . . . Pray, do you think me beautiful?" she asked, with a deep flush.

"Indeed, madam, I do," he said.

"I am glad of that," she answered heartily. "Do you think there are many men in France who have been asked in marriage by a beautiful maiden—with her own lips—and who have refused her to her face? I know you men would half despise such a triumph; but believe me, we women know more of what is precious in love. There is nothing that should set a person higher in his own esteem; and we women would prize nothing more dearly."

"You are very good," he said; "but you cannot make me forget that I was asked in pity and not for love."

"I am not so sure of that," she replied, holding down her head. "Hear me to an end, Monsieur de Beaulieu. I know how you must despise me; I feel you are right to do so; I am too poor a creature to occupy one thought of your mind, although, alas! you must die for me this morning. But when I asked you to marry me, indeed, and indeed, it was because I respected and admired you, and loved you with my whole soul, from the very moment that you took my part against my uncle. If you had seen yourself, and how noble you looked, you would pity rather than despise me. And now," she went on, hurriedly checking him with her hand, "although I have laid aside all reserve and told you so much, remember that I know your sentiments towards me already. I would not, believe me, being nobly born, weary you with importunities into consent. I, too, have a pride of my own; and I declare before the holy mother of God, if you should now go back from your word already given, I would no more marry you than I would marry my uncle's groom."

Denis smiled a little bitterly.

"It is a small love," he said, "that shies at a little pride."

She made no answer, although she probably had her own thoughts.

"Come hither to the window," he said, with a sigh. "Here is the dawn."

And indeed the dawn was already beginning. The hollow of the sky was full of essential daylight, colourless and clean; and the valley underneath was flooded with a grey reflection. A few thin vapours clung in the coves of the forest or lay along the winding course of the river. The scene disengaged a surprising effect of stillness, which was hardly interrupted when the cocks began once more to crow among the steadings. Perhaps the same fellow who had made so horrid a clangour in the darkness not half an hour before, now sent up the merriest cheer to greet the coming day. A little wind went bustling and eddying among the tree tops underneath the windows. And still the daylight kept flooding insensibly out of the east, which was soon to grow incandescent and cast up that red-hot cannon-ball, the rising sun.

Denis looked out over all this with a bit of a shiver. He had taken her hand and retained it in his almost unconsciously.

"Has the day begun already?" she said; and then, illogically enough: "the night has been so long! Alas! what shall we say to my uncle when he returns?"

"What you will," said Denis, and he pressed her fingers in his.

She was silent.

"Blanche," he said, with a swift, uncertain, passionate utterance, "you have seen whether I fear death. You must know well enough that I would as gladly leap out of that window into the empty air as lay a finger on you without your free and full consent. But if you care for me at all, do not let me lose my life in a misapprehension; for I love you better than the whole world; and though I will die for you blithely, it would be like all the joys of Paradise to live on and spend my life in your service."

As he stopped speaking, a bell began to ring loudly in the interior of the house; and a clatter of armour in the corridor showed that the retainers were returning to their post, and the two hours were at an end.

"After all that you have heard?" she whispered, leaning towards him with her lips and eyes.

"I have heard nothing," he replied.

"The captain's name was Florimond de Champdivers," she said in his ear.

"I did not hear it," he answered, taking her supple body in his arms, and covered her wet face with kisses.

A melodious chirping was audible behind, followed by a beautiful chuckle, and the voice of Messire de Malétroit wished his new nephew a good morning.

# Mateo Falcone

*"Justice is blind, he knows nobody"*

## By PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

*(Specially translated for* THE ARGOSY *by H. Miller)*

**World-famous as the librettist of the opera "Carmen," Prosper Merimee was also a master of the short story. His strong sense of the dramatic is well illustrated in this grim tale of terrible justice. Merimee suffered much on account of his royalist sympathies and it has been said that the establishment of the French Republic broke his heart. He died in 1870.**

LEAVING Porto Vecchio and walking north-west into the interior of the island, you find that the land rises rather steeply, and after a three hours' tramp along winding tracks, obstructed by large boulders, and sometimes severed by gorges, you come to the fringe of a very extensive "bush." The "bush" is the homeland of Corsican shepherds and of anyone who has fallen foul of the law. As you know, the Corsican shepherd saves himself the trouble of manuring his field by setting fire to a certain stretch of woodland. It is rather unfortunate if the flames spread further than is necessary; but, whatever happens, he is sure of a good crop from land fertilised with the ash of the trees that once grew upon it. When the ears have been gathered in (for the stalks are not worth that trouble and are, therefore, left standing), the roots, which have remained unburnt in the earth, put forth next spring a mass of shoots, which in a few years have reached a height of six or seven feet. It is this kind of matted undergrowth that is called "bush." It consists of various species of trees and shrubs jumbled together at their own sweet will. Only with a hatchet could a man clear a path for himself, and in places the "bush" is so thick and tangled that even the ibex cannot penetrate it.

If you have killed a man, make straight for the "bush" around Porto Vecchio; and there, with a good gun, powder and shot, you can live in peace. Do not forget a brown, hooded cloak which will serve as garment and mattress. The shepherds will give you milk, cheese and chestnuts; and you will have nothing to fear from the law or the dead man's relatives, unless you must enter the town to replenish your stock of ammunition.

When I was in Corsica in 18—, Mateo Falcone lived within half-a-league of this "bush." He was fairly wealthy for those parts, living a gentleman's life—that is, an idle life—on the produce of his flocks, which were pastured here and there on the mountains by wandering shepherds. When I saw him two years after the event I am about to describe, he looked no more than fifty years old. Imagine a short, sturdy man, with frizzy, jet-black hair and hooked nose, thin lips, large, expressive eyes, and a complexion like tanned boot-leather. His skill as a shot was considered out of the ordinary even in a country that can boast so many good shots. For instance, Mateo would never use buck-shot when hunting the ibex, but would bring it down at 120 yards with a single small shot in the head or shoulder at will. He was as good a shot by night as by day. I was told of one of his exhibitions of skill which would no doubt seem incredible to one who had never been to Corsica. At eighty yards, a lighted candle was placed behind a piece of transparent paper the size of a dinner plate. He took aim, the candle was then extinguished, and a minute later, in the most complete darkness, he hit the paper three times out of four.

With so unique an accomplishment, Mateo Falcone had achieved a considerable reputation. He was considered a staunch friend and an equally dangerous enemy. Obliging and charitable, he lived at peace with all in the Porto Vecchio district. But it was said that when, at Corte, he took unto himself a wife, he very forcefully rid himself of a rival who was reputed to be as formidable in war as he was in love;

at least, people attributed to Mateo a certain shot which surprised this rival while shaving before a small mirror hung against his window. When public interest cooled, Mateo married the girl. His wife, Giuseppa, to his infinite chagrin, at first presented him with three daughters; then arrived a son whom he called Fortunato, the hope of his family and heir to the name. The daughters had married well; their father could, at need, count upon the daggers and carbines of his sons-in-law. The son was only ten, but he already promised well.

One day in autumn, Mateo and his wife set out early to inspect one of their flocks in a clearing in the "bush." Little Fortunato wished to accompany them, but the clearing was too far; besides, someone had to look after the house—therefore his father refused. We shall see whether he had not cause to regret his action.

He had been gone some hours, and little Fortunato was tranquilly basking full length in the sun, gazing at the blue mountains and thinking that next Sunday he would dine in Corte with his uncle, the "Caporal,"* when his day-dream was suddenly interrupted by the report of a gun. He rose and scanned that portion of the plain whence the sound came. Other shots followed at irregular intervals, but growing nearer and nearer each time, till at last, in the path leading from the plain to Mateo's house, a man appeared, wearing the pointed cap of a mountaineer. He was unshaven, in tatters, and walked slowly and painfully leaning on his gun. He had just received a bullet in the thigh.

He was an outlaw who, having set out at night to buy powder in town, had fallen into an ambush laid by a detachment of Corsican Light Infantry. After defending himself vigorously, he succeeded in beating a retreat, hotly pursued and fighting his way from rock to rock. But he was very little ahead of the soldiers and, on account of his wound, was in no condition to make the "bush" before they caught him up.

He approached Fortunato and said:

"You are the son of Mateo Falcone."

"Yes."

"I am Gianetto Sanpiero. The 'yellow-collars' are after me. Hide me, for I can go no further."

And what will my father say if I hide you without his permission?"

"He will say you have acted rightly."

"But will he?"

"Hide me, quick; they are coming."

"Wait till father comes back."

"What—wait! Curse you. They'll be here in five minutes. Hide me right away or I'll kill you."

Fortunato replied with amazing coolness:

"Your gun is unloaded and there are no more cartridges in your cartridge-box."

"I have my stiletto."

"But can you run as fast as I?"

With a bound he was out of reach.

"You are no son of Mateo Falcone. Will you let them arrest me before your house?"

The child seemed moved.

"What will you give me if I hide you?" he said, coming nearer.

The outlaw fumbled in a leather purse which hung from his belt and drew out a five-franc piece which he had saved, no doubt, to buy powder. Fortunato smiled when he saw the silver; he snatched it and said to Gianetto: "Fear nothing."

Then he made a large hole in a hayrick which stood near the house. Gianetto squatted down in it, and the child covered up the hole in such a way that air could enter, but no one could suspect that a man was hidden there. The wide-awake young savage bethought himself of a rather ingenious ruse. He put a cat and her kittens on the hay to make believe it had not been touched for some little while. Then, noticing blood-stains on the path near the house, he carefully obliterated them with dust and, having done this, lay down once more in the sun as calmly as you please.

A few minutes after, six men, wearing brown tunics with yellow collars and led by an adjutant, stood before Mateo's door.

This adjutant was distantly related to Falcone. (It is well known that in Corsica they recognise more removes of relationship than in other parts.) His name was Tiodora Gamba; he was a man of action, greatly feared by outlaws, many of whom he had already tracked down.

He accosted Fortunato with:

"Good morning, little Cousin; what a big boy you have grown. Did you see a man pass this way just now?"

"Oh, I'm not yet as big as you, Cousin," replied the boy, with childish simplicity.

*A "caporal" was formerly a local chieftain who led the revolt against the feudal lords. Later the term was used to designate a man who through his large property and good connections was able to exercise a magisterial influence over a district.

" All in good time. But tell me, haven't you seen a man pass this way ? "

" Have I seen a man pass this way ? "

" Yes, a man with a black velvet pointed cap and a jacket with red and yellow braid."

" A man with a pointed cap and a jacket with red and yellow braid ? "

" Yes, answer quickly and don't repeat my questions."

" This morning the priest passed by our door on his horse, Piero. He asked how Daddy was, and I said——"

" Oh, you little rogue ! You're foxing. Tell me quickly which way Gianetto went, because it is he we are seeking ; and I am certain he took this path."

" Who knows ? "

" Who knows ? *I* know you saw him."

" Do we see passers-by when we are asleep ? "

" You were not asleep, rascal ; the shots woke you up."

" Do you think, Cousin, that your guns make so much noise ! My father's carbine makes more noise than they."

" The devil take you, you good-for-nothing imp ! I am certain you have seen Gianetto. Maybe you have even hidden him. Come on, lads, walk into the house and see if our man is there. He was hopping on one leg and he has too much common sense, the scoundrel, to try and hobble into the ' bush.' Besides, the blood-stains end here."

" And what will Daddy say ? " sneered Fortunato. " What will he say when he finds someone has been into his house while he was away ? "

" You scamp ! " said the adjutant, Gamba, taking him by the ear. " Do you know that I have it in my power to make you change your tune ? Perhaps if I hit you a score of times with the flat of my sword you will speak out."

Still Fortunato sneered.

" My father is Mateo Falcone," he said, with emphasis.

" Do you know, you little rogue, that I can take you to Corte or Bastia ? I shall make you sleep on straw in a prison cell with irons on your feet, and I shall have you guillotined if you don't tell me the whereabouts of Gianetto Sanpiero."

The child roared with laughter at this silly threat. He repeated : " My father is Mateo Falcone."

" Adjutant," whispered one of the soldiers, " Let us keep on the good side of Mateo."

Gamba was evidently in a predicament. He conversed in whispers with his men, who had already searched the house. It was not a lengthy operation, for a Corsican's hut consists only of one large, square room. The furniture comprises a table, a few seats and chests, and hunting or household gear. Meanwhile, little Fortunato stroked his cat and seemed to take a malicious delight in the embarrassment of the soldiers and his cousin.

A soldier walked up to the hayrick. He saw the cat and idly dug his bayonet into the hay, shrugging his shoulders as though he felt the futility of this precaution. Nothing stirred and the child's face betrayed not the slightest emotion.

¶

THE adjutant and his squad were at their wits' end. Already they were seriously looking towards the plain, as though ready to retrace their steps, when their leader, convinced that threats had no effect on Falcone's son, made a final bid with the power of kindness and gifts.

" Little cousin," he said, " you seem a live wire. You will do well. But you are playing me a dirty trick and, if I was not afraid of grieving my Cousin Mateo, I would take you away with me, the devil I would ! "

" Pooh ! "

" But, when my cousin returns, I shall tell him all about it ; and for having told a lie he will whip you black and blue."

" How do you know ? "

" You'll see. But, here—be a good lad and I'll give you something."

" Cousin, I'll give you a word of advice. If you delay much longer, Gianetto will be in the ' bush ' and it will take more than one fine chap like you to find him."

The adjutant drew from his pocket a silver watch worth about ten crowns and, noticing that little Fortunato's eyes sparkled at the sight of it, he dangled the watch on the end of his steel chain and said :

" You scapegrace, you would like to have a watch like this hanging from your neck, and you'd strut about the streets of Porto Vecchio as proud as a peacock ; and people would ask you : ' What is the time ? ' and you would tell them : ' Look at my watch.' "

" When I am grown up, my uncle, the ' caporal,' will give me a watch."

" Yes, but your uncle's boy already has

one—not as fine as this one, of course—still, he's younger than you."

The child sighed.

"Well, would you like this watch, little cousin?"

Fortunato, casting sidelong glances at the watch resembled a cat who has had a whole chicken given her. Thinking she is being teased, she dare not touch it, and averts her eyes from time to time so as to avoid yielding to the temptation; but she licks her chops continually and seems to say to her master: "How cruel your jokes are!"

Yet the adjutant appeared to offer the watch in earnest. Fortunato did not attempt to take it, but said with a bitter smile:

"Why are you teasing me?"

"My goodness! I'm not teasing you. Only tell me where Gianetto is and this watch is yours."

Fortunato smiled incredulously and, fixing his dark eyes on those of the adjutant, he tried to read in them how much good faith lay in those words.

"May I lose my stripes," cried the adjutant, "if I don't give you this watch on that condition. My mates are witnesses and I can't back out of it."

Speaking thus, he brought the watch nearer and nearer, till it almost touched the child's pale cheek. You could see in the child's face the struggle in his soul between greed and the respect due to hospitality. His bare chest heaved powerfully and he gasped for breath. Still the watch swayed, turned, and sometimes hit the tip of his nose. Then very, very slowly he raised his right hand to the watch; he touched it with his finger-tips and it rested completely in his hand, though the adjutant still held the chain. The dial was sky-blue, the case newly polished; it seemed all aflame in the sunlight. The temptation was too great.

Fortunato raised his left hand and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder at the hayrick against which he was leaning. The adjutant understood immediately. He let go his end of the chain. Fortunato felt himself sole owner of the watch. He sprang up as nimbly as a deer and stood ten paces from the hayrick, which the soldiers were already demolishing.

Very soon, something moved under the hay and a blood-stained man emerged, dagger in hand. He tried to stand, but could not, owing to his wound, which was now stiff and cold. He fell. The adjutant leapt upon him and snatched away his dagger. Then, despite his struggles, they bound him hand and foot.

Gianetto, lying on the ground trussed up like a bundle of firewood, turned his head towards Fortunato, who had come nearer.

"Son of a——" he said, more in scorn than in anger.

The child threw the man the coin he had given him, knowing he no longer deserved it; but the outlaw appeared not to notice the action. He said very coolly to the adjutant:

"My dear Gamba, I cannot walk; you will have to carry me to the town."

"You were running faster than a roebuck a minute ago," replied the cruel victor. "But don't worry. I am so glad to have caught you that I could carry you a league on my back without feeling weary. In any case, my friend, we are going to make you a stretcher with your cloak and a few branches, and at Crespoli farm we shall find horses."

"Right," said the prisoner. "You might also put some straw on your stretcher so that I can be more comfortable."

While some of the soldiers were busy making a kind of litter of chestnut branches and others were dressing Gianetto's wound, Mateo Falcone and his wife appeared suddenly round a bend in the road leading to the "bush." The woman stooped painfully under the weight of a huge sack of chestnuts, while her husband swaggered along carrying no more than one gun in his hand and another slung across his back, for it is beneath a man's dignity to carry anything beside his weapons.

When he saw the soldiers, Mateo's first thought was that they had come to arrest him. But why this suspicion? Had Mateo ever had a brush with the law? No. He bore a good character. He was, so to speak, without reproach. But he was a Corsican and a mountaineer; and there are few Corsican mountaineers who, if they racked their brains, could not recall some peccadillo, such as a shot or a stab or similar trifle. Mateo, more than anyone else, had a clean conscience, for it was more than ten years since he had levelled his gun against any man. Still, he was cautious, and put himself on the defensive, ready for any eventuality.

"Wife," said he to Giuseppa, "drop your sack and be prepared."

She obeyed immediately. He handed

her the gun that had been slung across his back and might, therefore, have been a hindrance. He cocked the other gun and slowly approached his house, hugging the fringe of trees by the roadside, ready, on the slightest sign of hostility, to dart behind the largest trunk and fire unseen. His wife walked on tip-toe, holding his spare gun and his cartridge-box. It is the duty of a good housewife, in the event of combat, to load her husband's fire-arms.

As for the adjutant, he was sore distressed to see Mateo approach thus, with measured tread, his gun cocked and his finger on the trigger.

"If by chance," he thought, "Mateo turned out to be a relative or friend of Gianetto, and wished to defend him, his two bullets would find billets in our midst as surely as a posted letter reaches its destination; and if he aimed at me, in spite of our relationship——"

¶

IN this extremity, he did a very brave thing. He approached Mateo alone in order to tell him, as an old acquaintance, the whole story; but the brief interval that separated him from Mateo seemed an age.

"Hullo, old friend!" he cried. "How are you, old boy? It is I, your cousin, Gamba."

Mateo, without replying, stopped and, while the other spoke, gradually raised the barrel of his gun till it was pointing heavenwards by the time the adjutant joined him.

"Good morning, brother,"* said the adjutant, offering his hand. "It is a long time since I last saw you."

"Good morning, brother."

"I called in on my way to see how you and cousin Pépa are getting on. We have had a weary drag to-day; but don't pity us, because we have made a fine capture. We have just laid hands on Gianetto Sanpiero."

"Thank heaven!" cried Giuseppa. "He stole a milch-goat from us a week ago."

These words delighted Gamba.

"Poor chap," said Mateo, "he was hungry."

"The rascal defended himself like a lion," continued the adjutant, somewhat crestfallen. "He killed one of my men and, as if that wasn't enough, broke Corporal Chardon's arm. Not that that matters, because he's only a Frenchman. Then he hid himself so well that Old Nick would not have found him. If it had not been for my little cousin, Fortunato, I would never have discovered him."

"Fortunato?" cried Mateo.

"Fortunato?" repeated Giuseppa.

"Yes, Gianetto was hiding under that hayrick, but my little cousin gave the show away. I shall tell his uncle, the 'caporal,' all about it, so that he should send him a nice present for his pains. And his name and yours will appear in the report I am sending to the Attorney-General."

"Curse it," said Mateo, under his breath.

They had by now come up with the squad. Gianetto was on the stretcher, ready to set off. When he saw Mateo and Gamba together, he smiled a strange smile; then, turning towards the door of the house, he spat on the threshold, saying:

"A traitor's house!"

Only a man about to die would have dared call Falcone a traitor. A well-aimed dagger-thrust, needing no second blow, would have wiped out the insult. Yet Mateo merely raised his hand to his forehead, like a man overwhelmed with grief.

Fortunato had gone into the house on seeing his father return. He reappeared later with a bowl of milk, which he offered with downcast eyes to Gianetto.

"Away from me," cried the outlaw in a terrible voice.

Then, turning to one of the soldiers:

"Give me a drink, mate," he said.

The soldier handed him his water-bottle, and the outlaw drank water given him by a man against whom he had been fighting a moment before. Then he requested that his hands might be tied across his chest instead of behind his back.

"I like to be comfortable," he said.

They hastened to do his bidding; after which the adjutant gave the signal for departure, bade farewell to Mateo, who did not reply, then marched briskly down to the plain.

It was ten minutes before Mateo opened his lips. The child glanced anxiously first at his mother and then at his father, who, leaning on his gun, gave him a look of concentrated rage.

"You are beginning well," Mateo said at last, in a calm voice that was terrifying to those who knew the man.

*The usual form of salutation in Corsica.

" Father," cried the child, coming towards him, almost in tears and about to fall on his knees.

But Mateo cried: " Don't come near me."

The boy stopped short, and stood sobbing, a few steps from his father.

Giuseppa approached. She had just noticed the watch chain hanging out of Fortunato's shirt-front.

" Who gave you that watch ? " she asked sternly.

" My cousin, the adjutant."

Falcone seized the watch and dashed it to pieces against a stone.

" Wife," he said, " is this my child ? "

Giuseppa's tanned cheeks grew brick-red.

" What do you mean, Mateo ? Do you know to whom you are speaking ? "

" Well, this child is the first of his stock to turn traitor."

Fortunato sobbed louder, and still Falcone had his lynx eyes fixed upon him. At last, he struck the earth with the butt of his gun, then threw it across his shoulder and set off for the " bush," shouting to the boy to follow. The child obeyed.

Giuseppa ran after Mateo and caught him by the arm.

" He is your son," she said in a tremulous voice, fixing her dark eyes on her husband's as though to read what was passing in his soul.

" Leave me," replied Mateo. " I'm his father."

Giuseppa kissed her son, then entered the hut weeping.

She fell on her knees before an image of the Virgin, and prayed fervently. Meanwhile, Mateo walked a couple of hundred yards down the path, stopping only when he came to a small gorge, into which he descended. He tested the earth with the butt end of his gun and found it soft and easy to dig. The place seemed right for his purpose.

" Fortunato, stand by that boulder."

The boy did as he was bidden, then sank upon his knees.

" Say your prayers."

" Father, father, don't kill me."

" Say your prayers," repeated Mateo in a terrifying voice.

The child, stammering and sobbing, repeated the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. His father, in a firm voice, said " Amen ! " at the end of each prayer.

" Are those all the prayers you know ? "

" Father, I also know Ave Maria and the Litany my aunt taught me."

" It is long, but never mind."

The end of the Litany was almost inaudible.

" Have you finished ? "

" Oh, father, please forgive me. I shan't do it again. I shall beg my cousin, the ' caporal,' ever so much to pardon Gianetto."

He said more besides. Mateo had cocked his gun and took aim, saying: " May God forgive you ! "

The child made a frantic effort to rise and clasp his father's knees, but he had no time. Mateo fired, and Fortunato fell stark dead.

Without glancing at the corpse, Mateo wended his way homewards for a spade with which to bury his son. He had only gone a few steps when he met Giuseppa, who had run up in alarm at the report.

" What have you done ? " she cried.

" Justice."

" Where is he ? "

" In the ravine. I am going to bury him. He died a Christian. I shall have a Mass sung for him. Let them tell my son-in-law, Tiodoro Bianchi, to come and live with us."

# The Eight Strokes of the Clock

*Mystery and a grim discovery at the Domaine de Halingre*

## By MAURICE LEBLANC

HORTENSE DANIEL pushed her window ajar and whispered "Are you there, Rossigny?"

"I am here," replied a voice from the shrubbery at the foot of the house.

Leaning forward, she saw a rather fat man looking up at her out of a gross, red face with its cheeks and chin set in unpleasantly fair whiskers.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, I had a great argument with my uncle and aunt last night. They absolutely refuse to sign the document of which my lawyer sent them the draft, or to restore the dowry squandered by my husband."

"But your uncle is responsible by the terms of the marriage settlement."

"No matter. He refuses."

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

"Are you still determined to run away with me?" she asked, with a laugh.

"More so than ever."

"Your intentions are strictly honourable, remember!"

"Just as you please. You know that I am madly in love with you."

"Unfortunately I am not madly in love with you!"

"Then what made you choose me?"

"Chance. I was bored. I was growing tired of my humdrum existence. So I'm ready to run risks. . . . Here's my luggage—catch!"

She let down from the window a couple of large leather kitbags. Rossigny caught them in his arms.

"The die is cast," she whispered. "Go and wait for me with your car at the If cross-roads. I shall come on horseback!"

"Hang it, I can't run off with your horse!"

"He will go home by himself."

"Capital! Oh, by the way——"

"What is it?"

"Who is this Prince Rénine who's been here the last three days and whom nobody seems to know?"

"I don't know much about him. My uncle met him at a friend's shoot and asked him here to stay."

"You seem to have made a great impression on him. You went for a long ride with him yesterday. He's a man I don't care for."

"In two hours I shall have left the house in your company. The scandal will cool him off . . . well, we've talked long enough."

For a few minutes she stood watching the fat man bending under the weight of her traps as he moved away in the shelter of an empty avenue. Then she closed the window.

Outside, in the park, the huntsmen's horns were sounding the reveille. The hounds burst into frantic baying. It was the opening day of the hunt that morning at the Château de la Marèze, where, every year, in the first week in September, the Comte d'Aigleroche, a mighty hunter before the Lord, and his countess, were accustomed to invite a few personal friends and the neighbouring landowners.

Hortense slowly finished dressing, put on a riding-habit which revealed the lines of her supple figure, and a wide-brimmed felt hat which encircled her lovely face and auburn hair, and sat down to her writing-desk, at which she wrote to her uncle, M. d'Aigleroche, a farewell letter to be delivered to him that evening. It was a difficult letter to word, and, after beginning it several times, she ended by giving up the idea.

"I will write to him later," she said to herself, "when his anger has cooled down."

And she went downstairs to the dining-room.

Enormous logs were blazing in the hearth of the lofty room. The walls were hung with trophies of rifles and shotguns. The guests were flocking in from every side, shaking hands with the Comte d'Aigleroche, one of those typical country squires, heavily and powerfully built, who live only for hunting and shooting. He was standing before the fire, with a large glass of old

brandy in his hand, drinking the health of each new arrival.

Hortense kissed him absently.

"What, Uncle! You who are usually so sober!"

"Pooh!" he said. "A man may surely indulge himself a little once a year!"

"Aunt will give you a scolding!"

"Your aunt has one of her sick headaches and is not coming down. Besides," he added gruffly, "it is not her business—and still less is it yours, my dear child."

Prince Rénine came up to Hortense. He was a young man, very smartly dressed, with a narrow and rather pale face, whose eyes held by turns the gentlest and the harshest, the most friendly and the most satirical expression. He bowed to her, kissed her hand and said:

"May I remind you of your kind promise, dear madame?"

"My promise?"

"Yes, we agreed that we should repeat our delightful excursion of yesterday and try to go over that old boarded-up place the look of which made us so curious. It seems to be known as the Domaine de Halingre."

She answered a little curtly:

"I'm extremely sorry, monsieur, but it would be rather far, and I'm feeling a little done up. I shall go for a canter in the park and come indoors again."

There was a pause. Then Serge Rénine said, smiling, with his eyes fixed on hers and in a voice which she alone could hear:

"I am sure that you'll keep your promise and that you'll let me come with you. It would be better."

"For whom? For you, you mean?"

"For you, too, I assure you."

She coloured slightly, but did not reply, shook hands with a few people around her and left the room.

A groom was holding the horse at the foot of the steps. She mounted and set off towards the woods beyond the park.

It was a cool, still morning. Through the leaves, which barely quivered, the sky showed crystalline blue. Hortense rode at a walk down winding avenues which in half-an-hour brought her to a countryside of ravines and bluffs intersected by the high road.

She stopped. There was not a sound. Rossigny must have stopped his engine and concealed the car in the thickets around the If cross-roads.

She was five hundred yards at most from that circular space. After hesitating for a few seconds she dismounted, tied her horse carelessly, so that he could release himself by the least effort and return to the house, shrouded her face in the long, brown veil that hung over her shoulders and walked on.

As she expected, she saw Rossigny directly she reached the first turn in the road. He ran up to her and drew her into the coppice.

"Quick, quick! Oh, I was so afraid that you would be late, or even change your mind! And here you are! It seems too good to be true!"

She smiled.

"You appear to be quite happy to do an idiotic thing!"

"I should think I *am* happy! And so will you be, I swear you will! Your life will be one long fairy-tale. You shall have every luxury, and all the money you wish."

"I want neither money nor luxuries."

"What then?"

"Happiness."

"You can safely leave your happiness to me."

She replied jestingly:

"I rather doubt the quality of the happiness which you would give me."

"Wait! You'll see! You'll see!"

They had reached the motor. Rossigny, still stammering expressions of delight, started the engine. Hortense stepped in and wrapped herself in a wide cloak. The car followed the narrow, grassy path which led back to the cross-roads, and Rossigny was accelerating the speed when he was suddenly forced to pull up. A shot had rung out from the neighbouring wood on the right. The car was swerving from side to side.

"A front tyre burst," shouted Rossigny, leaping to the ground.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Hortense. "Somebody fired!"

"Impossible, my dear! Don't be so absurd!"

At that moment two slight shocks were felt and two more reports were heard, one after the other, some way off and still in the wood.

Rossigny snarled.

"The back tyres burst now—both of them. But who, in the devil's name, can the ruffian be? Just let me get hold of him, that's all!"

He clambered up the roadside slope.

There was no one there. Moreover, the leaves of the coppice blocked the view.

"You were right: somebody was firing at the car! Oh, this is a bit thick! We shall be held up for hours! Three tyres to mend! But what are you doing, dear girl?" he exclaimed.

Hortense herself had alighted from the car. She ran to him, greatly excited.

"I'm going."

"But why?"

"I want to know. Someone fired. I want to know who it was."

"Don't let us separate, please!"

"Do you think I'm going to wait here for you for hours?"

"What about your running away? All our plans?"

"We'll discuss that to-morrow. Go back to the house. Take back my things with you—and good-bye for the present."

She hurriedly left him, had the good luck to find her horse, and set off at a gallop in a direction leading away from La Marèze.

There was not the least doubt in her mind that the three shots had been fired by Prince Rénine.

"It was he," she muttered angrily, "it was he. No one else would be capable of such behaviour."

Besides, he had warned her, in his smiling, masterful way, that he would expect her.

She was weeping with rage and humiliation. At that moment, had she found herself face to face with Prince Rénine, she could have struck him with her riding-whip.

¶

BEFORE her was the rugged and picturesque stretch of country which lies between the Orne and the Sarthe, above Alençon, and which is known as Little Switzerland. Steep hills compelled her frequently to moderate her pace, the more so as she had to cover some six miles before reaching her destination. But though the speed at which she rode became less headlong, though her physical effort gradually slackened, she nevertheless persisted in her indignation against Prince Rénine. She bore him a grudge not only for the unspeakable action of which he had been guilty, but also for his behaviour to her during the last three days, his persistent attentions, his assurance, his air of excessive politeness.

She was nearly there. In the bottom of a valley an old park wall, full of cracks and covered with moss and weeds, revealed the bell-turret of a château and a few windows with closed shutters. This was the Domaine de Halingre.

She followed the wall and turned a corner. In the middle of the crescent-shaped space before which lay the entrance gates, Serge Rénine stood waiting beside his horse.

She sprang to the ground, and as he stepped forward, hat in hand, thanking her for coming, she cried:

"One word, monsieur, to begin with. Something quite inexplicable happened just now. Three shots were fired at a motor-car in which I was sitting. Did you fire those shots?"

"Yes."

She seemed dumbfounded.

"Then you confess it?"

"You have asked a question, madame, and I have answered it."

"But how dared you? What gave you the right?"

"I was not exercising a right, madame. I was performing a duty!"

"Indeed! And what duty, pray?"

"The duty of protecting you against a man who is trying to profit by your troubles."

"I forbid you to speak like that. I am responsible for my own actions, and I decided upon them in perfect liberty."

"Madame, I overhead your conversation with M. Rossigny this morning and it did not appear to me that you were accompanying him with a light heart. I admit the ruthlessness and bad taste of my interference and I apologise for it humbly; but I risked being taken for a ruffian in order to give you a few hours for reflection."

"I have reflected fully, monsieur. When I have once made up my mind to a thing, I do not change it."

"Yes, madame, you do, sometimes. If not, why are you here instead of there?"

Hortense was confused for a moment. All her anger had subsided. She looked at Rénine with the surprise which one experiences when confronted with certain persons who are unlike their fellows, more capable of performing unusual actions, more generous and disinterested. She realised perfectly that he was acting without any ulterior motive or calculation, that he was, as he had said, merely fulfilling his duty as a gentleman to a woman who has taken the wrong turning.

Speaking very gently, he said :

" I know very little about you, madame, but enough to make me wish to be of use to you. You are twenty-six years old and have lost both your parents. Seven years ago you became the wife of the Comte d'Aigleroche's nephew by marriage, who proved to be of unsound mind, half-insane indeed, and had to be confined. This made it impossible for you to obtain a divorce, and compelled you, since your dowry had been squandered, to live with your uncle and at his expense. It's a depressing environment. The count and countess do not agree. Years ago the count was deserted by his first wife, who ran way with the countess's first husband. The abandoned husband and wife decided out of spite to unite their fortunes, but found nothing but disappointment and ill-will in this second marriage. And you suffer the consequences. They lead a monotonous, narrow, lonely life for eleven months or more out of the year. One day you met M. Rossigny, who fell in love with you and suggested an elopement. You did not care for him. But you were bored, your youth was being wasted, you longed for the unexpected, for adventure—in a word, you accepted with the very definite intention of keeping your admirer at arm's length, but also with the rather ingenuous hope that the scandal would force your uncle's hand and make him account for his trusteeship and assure you of an independent existence. That is how you stand. At present you have to choose between placing yourself in M. Rossigny's hands—or trusting yourself to me."

She raised her eyes to his. What did he mean ? What was the purport of this offer which he made so seriously, like a friend who asks nothing but to prove his devotion ?

After a moment's silence he took the two horses by the bridle and tied them up. Then he examined the heavy gates, each of which was strengthened by two planks nailed crosswise. An electoral poster, dated twenty years earlier, showed that no one had entered the domain since that time.

Rénine tore up one of the iron posts which supported a railing that ran round the crescent and used it as a lever. The rotten planks gave way. One of them uncovered the lock, which he attacked with a big knife, containing a number of blades and implements. A minute later the gate opened on a waste of bracken which led up to a long, dilapidated building, with a turret at each corner and a sort of belvedere, built on a taller tower, in the middle.

The prince turned to Hortense.

" You are in no hurry," he said. " You will form your decision this evening ; and if M. Rossigny succeeds in persuading you for the second time, I give you my word of honour that I shall not cross your path. Until then, grant me the privilege of your company. We made up our minds yesterday to inspect the château. Let us do so. Will you ? It is as good a way as any of passing the time, and I have a notion that it will not be uninteresting."

He had a way of talking which compelled obedience. He seemed to be commanding and entreating at the same time. Hortense did not even seek to shake off the enervation into which her will was slowly sinking. She followed him to a half-demolished flight of steps at the top of which was a door likewise strengthened by planks nailed in the form of a cross.

Rénine went to work in the same way as before. They entered a spacious hall paved with white and black flagstones, furnished with old sideboards and choir-stalls, and adorned with a carved escutcheon which displayed the remains of armorial bearings, representing an eagle standing on a block of stone, all half-hidden behind a veil of cobwebs which hung down over a pair of folding doors.

" The door of the drawing-room, evidently," said Rénine.

He found this more difficult to open ; and it was only by repeatedly charging it with his shoulder that he was able to move one of the doors.

Hortense had not spoken a word. She watched not without surprise this series of forcible entries, which were accomplished with a really masterly skill. He guessed her thoughts and, turning round, said in a serious voice :

" It's child's play to me. I was a locksmith once."

She seized his arm.

" Listen ! "

" To what ? " he asked.

She increased the pressure of her hand to demand silence. The next moment he murmured :

" It's really very strange."

" Listen, listen ! " Hortense repeated in bewilderment. " Can it be possible ? "

They heard, not far from where they

were standing, a sharp sound, the sound of a light tap recurring at regular intervals, and they had only to listen attentively to recognise the ticking of a clock. Yes, it was this and nothing else that broke the profound silence of the dark room; it was indeed the deliberate ticking, rhythmical as the beat of a metronome, produced by a heavy brass pendulum. That was it! And nothing could be more impressive than the measured pulsation of this trivial mechanism, which by some miracle, some inexpicable phenomenon, had continued to live in the heart of the dead château.

"And yet," stammered Hortense without daring to raise her voice, "no one has entered the house?"

"No one."

"And it is quite impossible for that clock to have kept going for twenty years without being wound up?"

"Quite impossible.

"Then——"

Serge Rénine opened the three windows and threw back the shutters.

He and Hortense were in a drawing-room, as he had thought; and the room showed not the least sign of disorder. The chairs were in their places. Not a piece of furniture was missing. The people who had lived there and who had made it the most individual room in their house had gone away, leaving everything just as it was, the books which they used to read, the knick-knacks on the tables, and consoles.

Rénine examined the old grandfather clock, contained in its tall, carved case which showed the disc of the pendulum through an oval pane of glass. He opened the door of the clock. The weights hanging from the cords were at their lowest point.

At that moment there was a click. The clock struck eight with a serious note which Hortense was never to forget.

"How very extraordinary!" she said.

"Extraordinary, indeed," said he, "for the works are exceedingly simple and would hardly keep going for a week."

"And do you see nothing out of the common?"

"No, nothing—or, at least——"

He stooped, and, from the back of the case, drew a metal tube which was concealed by the weights. Holding it up to the light:

"A telescope," he said thoughtfully. "Why did they hide it? . . . And they left it drawn out to its full length. . . . That's odd. . . . What does it mean?"

The clock, as sometimes happens, began to strike a second time, sounding eight strokes. Rénine closed the case and continued his inspection without putting the telescope down. A wide arch led from the drawing-room to a smaller apartment, a sort of smoking-room. This also was furnished, but contained a glass case for guns, of which the rack was empty. Hanging on a panel nearby was a calendar with the date of September 5.

"Oh," cried Hortense in astonishment, "the same date as to-day! . . . They tore off the leaves until September 5. . . . And this is the anniversary! What an astonishing coincidence!"

"Astonishing," he echoed. "It's the anniversary of their departure—twenty years from to-day."

"You must admit," she said, "that all this is incomprehensible."

"Yes, of course, but, all the same—perhaps not."

"Have you any idea?"

He waited a few seconds before replying:

"What puzzles me is this telescope, hidden, dropped in that corner, at the last moment. I wonder what it was used for. . . . From the ground-floor windows you see nothing but the trees in the garden . . . and the same, I expect, from all the windows. . . . We are in a valley, without the least open horizon. . . . To use the telescope, one would have to go up to the top of the house. . . . Shall we go up?"

She did not hesitate. The mystery surrounding the whole adventure excited her curiosity so keenly that she could think of nothing but accompanying Rénine and assisting him in his investigations.

They went upstairs accordingly and, on the second floor, came to a landing where they found the spiral staircase leading to the belvedere.

At the top of this was a platform in the open air, but surrounded by a parapet over six feet high.

"There must have been battlements which have been filled in since," observed Prince Rénine. "Look here, there were loopholes at one time. They have been blocked."

"In any case," she said, "the telescope was no use up here, either, and we may as well go down again."

"I don't agree," he said. "Logic tells us that there must have been some gap through which the country could be seen,

and that this was the spot where the telescope was used."

He hoisted himself by his wrists to the top of the parapet and then saw that this point of vantage commanded the whole of the valley, including the park, with its tall trees marking the horizon; and beyond a depression in a wood surmounting a hill, at a distance of some seven or eight hundred yards, stood another tower, squat and in ruins, covered with ivy from top to bottom.

Rénine resumed his inspection. He seemed to consider that the key to the problem lay in the use to which the telescope was put, and that the problem would be solved if only they could discover this use.

He studied the loopholes one after the other. One of them, or, rather, the place which it had occupied, attracted his attention above the rest. In the middle of the layer of plaster, which served to block it, there was a hollow filled with earth in which plants had grown. He pulled out the plants and removed the earth, thus clearing the mouth of a hole some five inches in diameter which completely penetrated the wall. On bending forward, Rénine perceived that this deep and narrow opening inevitably carried the eye, above the dense tops of the trees and through the depression in the hill, to the ivy-clad tower.

At the bottom of this channel, in a sort of groove which ran through it like a gutter, the telescope fitted so exactly that it was quite impossible to shift it, however little, either to the right or to the left.

Rénine, after wiping the outside of the lenses, while taking care not to disturb the lie of the instrument by a hair's breadth, put his eye to the small end.

He remained for thirty or forty seconds, gazing attentively and silently. Then he drew himself up and said, in a husky voice:

"It's terrible—it's really terrible."

"What is?" she asked anxiously.

"Look."

She bent down, but the image was not clear to her, and the telescope had to be focused to suit her sight. The next moment she shuddered, and said:

"It's two scarecrows, isn't it, both stuck up on the top? But why?"

"Look again," he said. "Look more carefully . . . under the hats . . . the faces. . ."

"Oh!" she cried, turning faint with horror. "How awful!"

The field of the telescope, like the circular picture shown by a magic lantern, presented this spectacle: the platform of a broken tower, the walls of which were higher in the more distant part, and formed, as it were, a back-drop, over which surged waves of ivy. In front, amid a cluster of bushes, were two human beings, a man and a woman, leaning back against a heap of fallen stones.

But the words man and woman could hardly be applied to these two forms, these two sinister puppets, which, it is true, wore clothes and hats—or, rather, shreds of clothes and remnants of hats—but had lost their eyes, their cheeks, their chins, every particle of flesh, until they were actually and positively nothing more than two skeletons.

"Two skeletons," stammered Hortense. "Two skeletons with clothes on. Who carried them up there?"

"Nobody."

"But, still——"

"That man and that woman must have died at the top of the tower years and years ago . . . and their flesh decayed under their clothes, and the ravens ate them."

"But it's hideous, hideous!" cried Hortense, pale as death, her face drawn with horror.

¶

HALF-AN-HOUR later, Hortense Daniel and Rénine left the Domaine de Halingre. Before their departure, they had gone as far as the ivy-grown tower, the remains of an old donjonkeep more than half-demolished. The inside was empty. There seemed to have been a way of climbing to the top, at a comparatively recent period, by means of wooden stairs and ladders which now lay broken and scattered over the ground. The tower backed against the wall, which marked the end of the park.

A curious fact, which surprised Hortense, was that Prince Rénine had neglected to pursue a more minute inquiry, as though the matter had lost all interest for him. He did not even speak of it any longer; and, in the inn at which they stopped and took a light meal in the nearest village, it was she who asked the landlord about the abandoned château. But she learnt nothing from him, for the man was new to the district and could give her no particulars. He did not even know the name of the owner.

They turned their horses' heads towards

La Marèze. Again and again Hortense recalled the squalid sight which had met their eyes. But Rénine, who was in a lively mood and full of attentions to his companion, seemed utterly indifferent to these questions.

"But, after all," she exclaimed impatiently, "we can't leave the matter there! It calls for a solution."

"As you say," he replied, "a solution is called for. M. Rossigny has to know where he stands, and you have to decide what to do about him."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He's of no importance for the moment. The thing to-day——"

"Is what?"

"Is to know what those two dead bodies are."

"Still, Rossigny——"

"Rossigny can wait. But I can't. You have shown me a mystery which is now the only thing that matters. What do you intend to do?"

"To do?"

"Yes. There are two bodies. . . . You'll inform the police, I suppose?"

"Gracious goodness!" he exclaimed, laughing. "What for?"

"Well, there's a riddle that has to be cleared up at all costs, a terrible tragedy."

"We don't need anyone to do that."

"What! Do you mean to say that you understand it?"

"Almost as plainly as though I had read it in a book, told in full detail, with explanatory illustrations. It's all so simple!"

She looked at him askance, wondering if he was making fun of her. But he seemed quite serious.

"Well?" she asked, quivering with curiosity.

The light was beginning to wane. They had trotted at a good pace, and the hunt was returning as they neared La Marèze.

"Well," he said, "we shall get the rest of our information from people living round about . . . from your uncle, for instance; and you will see how logically all the facts fit in. When you hold the first link of a chain you are bound, whether you like it or not, to reach the last. It's the greatest fun in the world."

Once in the house they separated. On going to her room, Hortense found her luggage and a furious letter from Rossigny, in which he bade her good-bye, and announced his departure.

Then Rénine knocked at her door.

"Your uncle is in the library," he said. "Will you go down with me?"

She went with him. He added:

"One word more. This morning, when I thwarted your plans and begged you to trust me, I naturally undertook an obligation towards you which I mean to fulfil without delay. I want to give you a positive proof of this."

She laughed.

"The only obligation which you took upon yourself was to satisfy my curiosity."

"It shall be satisfied," he assured her gravely, "and more fully than you can possibly imagine."

M. d'Aigleroche was alone. He was smoking his pipe and drinking sherry.

"Well, Hortense!" he said in a rather thick voice. "You know that it's pretty dull here, except in these September days. You must make the most of them. Have you had a pleasant ride with Rénine?"

"That's just what I wanted to talk about, my dear sir," interrupted the prince.

"You must excuse me, but I have to go to the station in ten minutes to meet a friend of my wife's."

"Oh, ten minutes will be ample!"

"Just the time to smoke a cigarette?"

"No longer."

He took a cigarette from the case which M. d'Aigleroche handed to him, lit it, and said:

"I must tell you that our ride happened to take us to an old domain which you are sure to know, the Domaine de Halingre."

"Certainly I know it. But it has been closed, boarded up for twenty-five years or so. You weren't able to get in, I suppose?"

"Yes, we were."

"Really? Was it interesting?"

"Extremely. We discovered the strangest things."

"What things?" asked the count, looking at his watch.

Rénine described what they had seen.

"On a tower some way from the house there were two dead bodies, two skeletons, rather . . . a man and a woman still wearing the clothes which they had on when they were murdered."

"Come, come, now! Murdered?"

"Yes; and that is what we have come to trouble you about. The tragedy must date back to some twenty years ago. Was nothing known of it at the time?"

"Certainly not," declared the count.

"I never heard of any such crime or disappearance."

"Oh, really!" said Rénine, looking a little disappointed. "I hoped to obtain a few particulars."

"I'm sorry."

"In that case, I apologise."

He consulted Hortense with a glance and moved towards the door. But, on second thoughts:

"Could you not at least, my dear sir, bring me into touch with some persons in the neighbourhood, some members of your family, who might know more about it?"

"Of my family? And why?"

"Because the Domaine de Halingre used to belong, and no doubt still belongs, to the d'Aigleroches. The arms are an eagle on a heap of stones, on a rock. This at once suggested the connection."

This time the count appeared surprised. He pushed back his decanter and his glass of sherry and said:

"What's this you're telling me? I had no idea that we had any such neighbours."

Rénine shook his head and smiled.

"I should be more inclined to believe, sir, that you were not very eager to admit any relationship between yourself . . . and the unknown owner of the property."

"Then he's not a respectable man?"

"The man, to put it plainly, is a murderer."

"What do you mean?"

The count had risen from his chair. Hortense, greatly excited, said:

"Are you really sure that there has been a murder and that the murder was done by someone belonging to the house?"

"Quite sure."

"But why are you so certain?"

"Because I know who the two victims were and what caused them to be killed."

Prince Rénine was making none but positive statements, and his method suggested the belief that he was supported by the strongest proofs.

M. d'Aigleroche strode up and down the room, with his hands behind his back. He ended by saying:

"I always had an instinctive feeling that something had happened, but I never tried to find out. . . . Now, as a matter of fact, twenty years ago, a relation of mine, a distant cousin, used to live at the Domaine de Halingre. I hoped, because of the name I bear, that this story, which, as I say, I never knew, but suspected, would remain hidden for ever."

"So this cousin killed somebody?"

"Yes, he was obliged to."

Rénine shook his head.

"I am sorry to have to amend that phrase, my dear sir. The truth, on the contrary, is that your cousin took his victims' lives in cold blood and in a cowardly manner. I never heard of a crime more deliberately and craftily planned."

"What is it that you know?"

The moment had come for Rénine to explain himself, a solemn and anguish-stricken moment, the full gravity of which Hortense understood, though she had not yet divined any part of the tragedy which the prince unfolded step by step.

"It's a very simple story," he said. "There is every reason to believe that M. d'Aigleroche was married, and that there was another couple living in the neighbourhood with whom the owners of the Domaine de Halingre were on friendly terms. What happened one day, which of these four persons first disturbed the relations between the two households, I am unable to say. But a likely version, which at once occurs to the mind, is that your cousin's wife, Madame d'Aigleroche, was in the habit of meeting the other husband in the ivy-covered tower, which had a door opening outside the estate. On discovering the intrigue, your cousin d'Aigleroche resolved to be revenged, but in such a manner that there should be no scandal and that no one even should ever know that the guilty pair had been killed. Now he had ascertained—as I did just now—that there was a part of the house, the belvedere, from which you can see, over the trees and the undulations of the park, the tower standing eight hundred yards away, and that this was the only place that overlooked the top of the tower. He therefore pierced a hole in the parapet, through one of the former loopholes, and from there, by using a telescope which fitted exactly in the groove which he had hollowed out, he watched the meetings of the two lovers. And it was from there, also, that, after carefully taking all his measurements and calculating all his distances, on a Sunday, September 5, when the house was empty, he killed them with two shots."

The truth was becoming apparent. The light of day was breaking. The count muttered:

"Yes, that's what must have happened. I expect that my cousin d'Aigleroche——"

"The murderer," Rénine continued, "then stopped up the loophole with a clod of earth. No one would ever know that two dead bodies were decaying on the top of that tower which was never visited and of which he took the precaution to demolish the wooden stairs. Nothing therefore remained for him to do but to explain the disappearance of his wife and his friend. This presented no difficulty. He accused them of having eloped together."

Hortense gave a start. Suddenly, as though the last sentence were a complete and to her an absolutely unexpected revelation, she understood what Rénine was trying to convey.

"What do you mean?" she asked tremulously.

"I mean that M. d'Aigleroche accused his wife and his friend of eloping together."

"No, no!" she cried. "I can't allow that! . . . You are speaking of a cousin of my uncle's? Why mix up two stories?"

"Why mix up this story with another which took place at that time?" said the prince. "But I am not mixing them up, my dear madame; there is only one story, and I am telling it as it happened."

Hortense turned to her uncle. He sat silent, with his arms folded, and his head remained in the shadow cast by the lamp-shade. Why had he not protested?

Rénine repeated in a firm tone:

"There is only one story. On the evening of that very day, September 5, at eight o'clock, M. d'Aigleroche, doubtless alleging as his reason that he was going in pursuit of the runaway couple, left his house after boarding up the entrance. He went away, leaving all the rooms as they were and removing only the firearms from their glass case. At the last minute he had a presentiment, which has been justified to-day, that the discovery of the telescope which had played so great a part in the preparation of his crime might serve as a clue to an inquiry, and he threw it into the clock-case, where, as luck would have it, it interrupted the swing of the pendulum. This unreflecting action, one of those which every criminal inevitably commits, was to betray him twenty years later. Just now, the blows which I struck to force the door of the drawing-room released the pendulum. The clock was set going, struck eight o'clock . . . and I possessed the clue of thread which was to lead me through the labyrinth."

"Proofs!" stammered Hortense. "Proofs!"

"Proofs?" Rénine replied, in a loud voice. "Why, there are any number of proofs; and you know them as well as I do. Who could have killed at that distance of eight hundred yards, except an expert shot, an ardent sportsman? You agree, M. d'Aigleroche, do you not? . . . Proofs? Why was nothing removed from the house, nothing except the guns, those guns which an ardent sportsman cannot afford to leave behind—you agree, M. d'Aigleroche—those guns which we find here, hanging in trophies on the walls! . . . Proofs? What about that date, September 5, which was the date of the crime and which has left such a horrible memory in the criminal's mind that every year at this time—at this time alone—he surrounds himself with distractions, and that every year, on this same September 5, he forgets his habits of temperance? Well, to-day is September 5. . . . Proofs? Why, if there weren't any others, would that not be enough for you?"

And Rénine, flinging out his arm, pointed to the Comte d'Aigleroche, who, terrified by this evocation of the past, had sunk huddled into his chair and was hiding his head in his hands.

Hortense did not attempt to argue with him. She had never liked her uncle, or, rather, her husband's uncle. She now accepted the accusation laid against him.

Sixty seconds passed. Then M. d'Aigleroche walked up to them and said:

"Whether the story be true or not, you can't call a husband a criminal for avenging his honour and killing his faithless wife."

"No," replied Rénine, "but I have told only the first version of the story. There is another which is infinitely more serious . . . and more probable, one to which a more thorough investigation would be sure to lead."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. It may not be a matter of a husband taking the law into his own hands, as I charitably supposed. It may be a matter of a ruined man who covets his friend's money and his friend's wife, and who, with this object in view, to secure his freedom, to get rid of his friend and of his own wife, draws them into a trap, suggests to them that they should visit that lonely tower, and kills them by shooting

them from a distance safely under cover."

"No, no," the count protested. "No, all that is untrue."

"I don't say it isn't. I am basing my accusation on proofs, but also on intuitions and arguments which up to now have been extremely accurate. All the same, I admit that the second version may be incorrect. But, if so, why feel any remorse? One does not feel remorse for punishing guilty people."

"One does for taking life. It is a crushing burden to bear."

"Was it to give himself greater strength to bear this burden that M. d'Aigleroche afterwards married his victim's widow? For that, sir, is the crux of the question. What was the motive of that marriage? Was M. d'Aigleroche penniless? Was the woman he was taking as his second wife rich? Or were they both in love with each other, and did M. d'Aigleroche plan with her to kill his first wife and the husband of his second wife? These are the problems to which I do not know the answer. They have no interest for the moment; but the police, with all the means at their disposal, would have no great difficulty in elucidating them."

M. d'Aigleroche staggered and had to steady himself against the back of a chair. Livid in the face, he spluttered:

"Are you going to inform the police?"

"No, no," said Rénine. "To begin with, there is the statue of limitations. Then there are twenty years of remorse and dread, a memory which will pursue the criminal to his dying hour, accompanied no doubt by domestic discord, hatred, a daily hell . . . and, in the end, the necessity of returning to the tower and removing the traces of the two murders, the frightful punishment of climbing that tower, of touching those skeletons, of undressing them and burying them. That will be enough. We will not ask for more. We will not give it to the public to batten on and create a scandal which would recoil upon M. d'Aigleroche's niece. No, let us leave this disgraceful business alone."

The count resumed his seat at the table, with his hands clutching his forehead, and asked:

"Then why—— ?"

"Why do I interfere?" said Rénine. "What you mean is that I must have had some object in speaking. That is so. There must indeed be a penalty, however slight, and our interview must lead to some practical result. But have no fear. M. d'Aigleroche will be let off lightly."

The contest was ended. The count felt that he had only a small formality to fulfil, a sacrifice to accept; and, recovering some of his self-assurance, he said, in an almost sarcastic tone:

"What's your price?"

Rénine burst out laughing.

"Splendid! You see the position. Only, you make a mistake in drawing me into the business. I'm working for the glory of the thing."

"In that case?"

"You will be called upon at most to make restitution."

"Restitution?"

Rénine leant over the table and said:

"In one of those drawers is a deed awaiting your signature. It is a draft agreement between you and your niece, Hortense Daniel, relating to her private fortune, which fortune was squandered and for which you are responsible. Sign the deed."

M. d'Aigleroche gave a start.

"Do you know the amount?"

"I don't wish to know it."

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall ask to see the Comtesse d'Aigleroche."

Without further hesitation the count opened a drawer, produced a document on stamped paper, and signed it.

"Here you are," he said, "and I hope——"

"You hope, as I do, that you and I may never have any future dealings? I'm convinced of it. I shall leave this evening; your niece, no doubt, to-morrow. Good-bye."

# TRILBY

## By GEORGE DU MAURIER

**Trilby O'Ferral is an artists' model, of winsome and lovable personality, who has carte blanche of the studio of Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird, three boisterously bohemian art students of the Latin quarter. Here, she meets Svengali, a brilliant but unpleasant German musician who admires her singing and cures her of great pain by mesmerism. In this way Svengali gradually obtains a control over Trilby's actions.**

**Little Billee falls seriously in love with Trilby. Realising this, and suddenly horrified at her former care-free mode of existence, Trilby is easily persuaded by Little Billee's parents to give him up. Little Billee, after a serious illness induced by grief, returns to England.**

**Five years pass. Little Billee has become a famous artist. Neither his success nor his social distractions, however, enable him to forget Trilby, and a visit from Taffy and the Laird, now grown quite respectable, revives memories of the old bohemian days.**

**The three ex-bohemians revisit Paris, where they attend a concert to hear a wonderful new singer, La Svengali, whose fame has already spread throughout Europe. When La Svengali enters the hall the three friends are dumbfounded to recognise in the world-famous singer their old companion, Trilby.**

OUR three friends were almost turned to stone in the immensity of their surprise.

Yet the big Taffy was trembling all over; the Laird's jaw had all but fallen on to his chest; Little Billee was staring, staring his eyes almost out of his head. There was something, to them, so strange and uncanny about it all; so oppressive, so anxious, so momentous!

The applause had at last subsided. Trilby stood with her hands behind her, one foot (the left one) on a little stool that had been left there on purpose, her lips parted, her eyes on Svengali's ready to begin.

He gave his three beats, and the band struck a chord. Then, at another beat from him, but in her direction, she began, without the slightest appearance of effort, without any accompaniment whatever, he still beating time—conducting her, in fact, just as if she had been an orchestra herself:

"Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot!
Prête-moi ta plume
Pour écrire un mot.
Ma chandelle est morte . . .;
Je n'ai plus de feu!
Ouvre-moi ta porte
Pour l'amour de Dieu!"

This was the absurd old nursery rhyme with which La Svengali chose to make her *début* before the most critical audience in the world! She sang it three times over—the same verse. There is but one.

The first time she sang it without any expression whatever—not the slightest. Just the words and the tune; in the middle of her voice, and not loud at all; just as a child sings who is thinking of something else; or just as a young French mother sings who is darning socks by a cradle and rocking her baby to sleep with her foot.

But her voice was so immense in its softness, richness, freshness, that it seemed to be pouring itself out from all round; its intonation absolutely, mathematically pure; one felt it to be not only faultless, but infallible; and the seduction, the novelty of it, the strangely sympathetic quality! How can one describe the quality of a peach or a nectarine to those who have only known apples?

Until La Svengali appeared, the world had only known apples—Catalanis, Jenny Linds, Grisis, Albonis, Pattis! The best apples that can be, for sure—but still only apples!

If she had spread a pair of large white wings and gracefully fluttered up to the roof and perched upon the chandelier, she could not have produced a greater sensation. The like of that voice has never been heard, nor ever will be again. A woman archangel might sing like that, or some enchanted princess out of a fairy tale.

Little Billee had already dropped his face into his hands and hid his eyes in his pocket-handkerchief; a big tear had fallen on to Taffy's left whisker; the Laird was trying hard to keep his tears back.

She sang the verse a second time, with but little added expression and no louder; but with a sort of breathy widening of her voice that made it like a broad heavenly smile of universal motherhood turned into sound. One felt all the genial gaiety and grace of impishness of Pierrot and Columbine idealised into frolicsome beauty and holy innocence, as though they were

performing for the saints in Paradise—a baby Columbine, with a cherub for clown! The dream of it all came over you for a second or two—a revelation of some impossible golden age—priceless—never to be forgotten! How on earth did she do it?

Little Billee had lost all control over himself, and was shaking with his suppressed sobs—Little Billee, who hadn't shed a single tear for five long years! Half the people in the house were in tears, but tears of sheer delight, of delicate inner laughter.

Then she came back to earth, and saddened and veiled and darkened her voice as she sang the verse for the third time; and it was a great and sombre tragedy, too deep for any more tears; and somehow or other poor Columbine, forlorn and betrayed and dying, out in the cold at midnight—sinking down to hell, perhaps—was making her last frantic appeal! It was no longer Pierrot and Columbine—it was Marguerite—it was Faust! It was the most terrible and pathetic of all possible human tragedies, but expressed with no dramatic or histrionic exaggeration of any sort; by mere tone, slight, subtle changes in the quality of the sound—too quick and elusive to be taken count of, but to be felt with, oh, what poignant sympathy!

¶

WHEN the song was over, the applause did not come immediately, and she waited with her kind wide smile, as if she were well accustomed to wait like this; and then the storm began, and grew and spread and rattled and echoed—voices, hands, feet, sticks, umbrellas!—and down came the bouquets, which the little page-boys picked up; and Trilby bowed to front and right and left in her simple *débonnaire* fashion. It was her usual triumph. It had never failed, whatever the audience, whatever the country, whatever the song.

Little Billee didn't applaud. He sat with his head in his hands, his shoulders still heaving. He believed himself to be fast asleep and in a dream, and was trying his utmost not to wake; for a great happiness was his. It was one of those nights to be marked with a white stone!

As the first bars of the song came pouring out of her parted lips (whose shape he so well remembered), and her dove-like eyes looked straight over Svengali's head, straight in his own direction—nay, *at* him—something melted in his brain, and all his long-lost power of loving came back with a rush.

It was like the sudden curing of a deafness that has been lasting for years. The doctor blows through your nose into your Eustachian tube with a little india-rubber machine; some obstacle gives way, there is a snap in your head, and straightway you hear better than you had ever heard in all your life, almost too well; and all your life is once more changed for you!

At length he sat up again, in the middle of La Svengali's singing of the "Nussbaum," and saw her; and saw the Laird sitting by him, and Taffy, their eyes riveted on Trilby, and knew for certain that it was *no* dream this time, and his joy was almost a pain!

She sang the "Nussbaum" (to its heavenly accompaniment) as simply as she had sung the previous song. Every separate note was a highly-finished gem of sound, linked to the next by a magic bond. You did not require to be a lover of music to fall beneath the spell of such a voice as that; the mere melodic phrase had all but ceased to matter. Her phrasing, consummate as it was, was as simple as a child's.

It was as if she said: "See! what does the composer count for? Here is about as beautiful a song as was ever written, with beautiful words to match, and the words have been made French for you by one of your smartest poets! But what do the words signify, any more than the tune, or even the language? The 'Nussbaum' is neither better nor worse than 'Mon ami Pierrot' when I am the singer; for I am *Svengali*; and you shall hear nothing, see nothing, think of nothing but *Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*"

It was the apotheosis of voice and virtuosity! It was "il bel canto" come back to earth after a hundred years—the bel canto of Vivarelli, let us say, who sang the same song every night to the same King of Spain for a quarter of a century, and was rewarded with a dukedom and wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

And, indeed, here was this immense audience, assisting with rapt ears and streaming eyes at the imagined spectacle of a simple German damsel, a Mädchen, a Fräulein, just *verlobte*—a future Hausfrau—sitting under a walnut-tree in some suburban garden—à Berlin!—and around her, her family and her friends, probably drinking beer and smoking long porcelain pipes, and talking politics or business, and cracking innocent elaborate old German jokes; with bated breath, lest they should disturb her maiden dream of love! And all as though it were a scene in Elysium, and the Fräulein a nymph of many-fountained Ida, and her people Olympian gods and goddesses.

And such, indeed, they were when Trilby sang of them!

After this, when the long, frantic applause had subsided, she made a gracious bow to the royal British opera-glass (which had never left her face), and sang "Ben Bolt" in English!

And then Little Billee remembered there was such a person as Svengali in the world, and recalled his little flexible flageolet!

"That is how I teach Gecko; that is how I teach la bedite Honorine; that is how I teach il bel canto. . . . It was lost, il bel canto—and I found it in a dream—I, Svengali!"

And his old cosmic vision of the beauty and sadness of things, the very heart of them, and their pathetic evanescence, came back with a tenfold clearness—that heavenly glimpse beyond the veil! And with it a crushing sense of his own infinitesimal significance by the side of this glorious pair of artists, one of whom had been his friend and the other his love—a love who had offered to be his humble mistress and slave, not feeling herself good enough to be his wife!

It made him sick and faint to remember, and filled him with hot shame, and then and there his love for Trilby became as that of a dog for its master!

She sang once more "Chanson de Printemps," by Gounod (who was present, and seemed very hysterical), and the first part of the concert was over, and people had time to draw breath and talk over this new wonder, this revelation of what the human voice could achieve; and an immense hum filled the hall—astonishment, enthusiasm, ecstatic delight!

But our three friends found little to say—for what *they* felt there were as yet no words!

Taffy and the Laird looked at Little Billee, who seemed to be looking inward at some transcendent dream of his own; with red eyes, and his face all pale and drawn, and his nose very pink, and rather thicker than usual; and the dream appeared to be out of the common blissful, though his eyes were swimming still, for his smile was almost idiotic in its rapture!

The second part of the concert was still shorter than the first, and created, if possible, a wilder enthusiasm.

Trilby only sang twice.

Her first song was "Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre."

She began it quite lightly and merrily, like a jolly march; in the middle of her voice, which had not as yet revealed any exceptional compass or range. People laughed quite frankly at the first verse:

"Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre. . .
Ne sais quand reviendra!
Ne sais quand reviendra!
Ne sais quand reviendra!"

The *mironton, mirontaine* was the very essence of high martial resolve and heroic self-confidence; one would have led a forlorn hope after hearing it once!

"Il reviendra-z á Pâques—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Il reviendra-z á Pâques. . . .
Ou . . . á la Trinité!"

People still laughed, though the *mironton, mirontaine*, betrayed an uncomfortable sense of the dawning of doubts and fears—vague forebodings!

"La Trinité se passe—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
La Trinité se passe. . . .
Malbrouck ne evient pas!"

And here, especially in the *mironton, mirontaine* a note of anxiety revealed itself—so poignant, so acutely natural and human, that it became a personal anxiety of one's own, causing the heart to beat and one's breath was short.

"Madame á sa tour monte—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Madame á sa tour monte,
Si haut qu'elle peut monter!"

Oh! How one's heart went with her! Anne! Sister Anne! Do you see anything?

"Elle voit de loin son page—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Elle voit de loin son page,
Tout de noir habillé!"

One is almost sick with the sense of impending calamity—it is all but unbearable!

"Mon page—mon beau page!—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Mon page—mon beau page!
Quelle nouvelles apportez?"

And here Little Billee begins to weep again, and so does everybody else! The *mironton, mirontaine*, is an agonised wail of suspense—poor bereaved duchess!—poor Sarah Jennings! Did it all announce itself to you just like that?

All this while the accompaniment had been quite simple—just a few obvious ordinary chords.

But now, quite suddenly, without a single modulation or note of warning, down goes the tune a full major third, from E to C—into the graver depths of Trilby's great contralto—so solemn and ominous that there is no more weeping, but the flesh creeps; the accompaniment slows and elaborates itself; the march becomes a funeral march, with muted strings, and quite slowly:

"Aux nouvelles que j'apporte—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Aux nouvelles que j'apporte,
Vos beaux yeux vont pleurer!"

Richer and richer grows the accompaniment. The *mironton, mirontaine*, becomes a dirge!

"Quittez vos habits roses—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Quittez vos habits roses,
Et vos satins brochés!"

Here the ding-donging of a big bell seems to mingle with the score; . . . and very slowly, and so impressively that the news will ring for ever in the ears and hearts of those who hear it from La Svengali's lips:

"Le Sieur Malbrouck est mort—
*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!*
Le Sieur—Malbrouck—est—mort!
Est mort—et enterré!"

And thus it ends quite abruptly!

And this heartrending tragedy, this great historical epic in two dozen lines, at which some five or six thousand gay French people are sniffling and mopping their eyes like so many Niobes, is just a common old French comic song—a mere nursery ditty, like "Little Bo-peep"—to the tune,

"We won't go home till morning,
Till daylight doth appear."

And after a second or two of silence (oppressive and impressive as that which occurs at a burial when the handful of earth is being dropped on the coffin lid) the audience bursts once more into madness; and La Svengali, who accepts no encores, has to bow for nearly five minutes, standing amid a sea of flowers. . . .

Then comes her great and final performance. The orchestra swiftly plays the first four bars of the bass in Chopin's Impromptu (A flat); and suddenly, without words, as a light nymph catching the whirl of a double skipping-rope, La Svengali breaks in and vocalises that astounding piece of music that so few pianists can even play; but no pianist has ever played it like this; no piano has ever given out such notes as these!

Every single phrase is a string of perfect gems, of purest ray serene, strung together on a loose golden thread! The higher and shriller she sings, the sweeter it is; higher and shriller than any woman had ever sung before.

Waves of sweet and tender laughter, the very heart and essence of innocent, high-spirited girlhood, alive to all that is simple and joyous and elementary in nature—the freshness of the morning, the ripple of the stream, the click of the mill, the lisp of the wind in the trees, the song of the lark in the cloudless sky—the sun and the dew, the scent of early flowers and summer woods and meadows—the sight of birds and bees and butterflies and frolicsome young animals at play—all the sights and scents and sounds that are the birthright of happy children, happy savages in favoured climes—things within the remembrance and the reach of most of us! All this, the memory and the feel of it, are in Trilby's voice as she warbles that long, smooth, lilting, dancing laugh, that shower of linked sweetness, that wondrous song without words; and those who hear feel it all, and remember it with her. It is irresistible; it forces itself on you; no words, no pictures, could ever do the like! So that the tears that are shed out of all these many French eyes are tears of pure, unmixed delight in happy reminiscence!

Then comes the slow movement, the sudden adagio, with its capricious ornaments—the waking of the virgin heart, the stirring of the sap, the dawn of love; its doubts and fears and questionings; and the mellow, powerful, deep chest notes are like the pealing of great golden bells, with a light little pearl shower tinkling round—drops from the upper fringe of her grand voice as she shakes it. . . .

Then back again the quick part, childhood once more, *da capo*, only quicker! hurry, hurry! but distinct as ever. Loud and shrill and sweet beyond compare—drowning the orchestra; of a piercing quality quite ineffable; a joy there is no telling; a clear, purling, crystal stream that gurgles and foams and bubbles along over sunlit stones; a wonder, a world's delight!

And there is not a sign of effort, of difficulty overcome. All through, Trilby smiles her broad, angelic smile; her lips well parted, her big white teeth glistening as she gently jerks her head from side to side in time to Svengali's bâton, as if to shake the willing notes out quicker and higher and shriller. . . .

And in a minute or two it is all over, like the lovely bouquet of fireworks at the end of the show, and she lets what remains of it die out and away like the afterglow of fading Bengal fires—her voice receding into the distance—coming back to you like an echo from all round, from anywhere you please—quite soft—hardly more than a breath; but *such* a breath! Then one last chromatically ascending rocket, *pianissimo*, up to E in alt, and then darkness and silence!

And after a little pause the many-headed rises as one, and waves its hats and sticks and handkerchiefs, and stamps and shouts . . . "Vive La Svengali! Vive La Svengali!"

Svengali steps on to the platform by his wife's side and kisses her hand; and they both bow themselves backward through the curtains, which fall, to rise again and again and again on this astounding pair!

Such was La Svengali's *début* in Paris.

¶

IT had lasted little over an hour, one quarter of which, at least, had been spent in plaudits and courtesies!!

The writer is no musician, alas! (as, no doubt, his musical readers have found out by this) save in his thraldom to music of not too severe a kind, and laments the clumsiness and inadequacy of this wild (though somewhat ambitious) attempt to recall an impression received more than thirty years ago; to revive the ever-blessed memory of that unforgettable first night at the Cirque des Bashibazoucks.

Would that I could transcribe here Berlioz's famous series of twelve articles, entitled "La Svengali," which were republished from *La Lyre Eolienne*, and are now out of print!

Or Théophile Gautier's elaborate rhapsody, "Madame Svengali—*Ange ou Femme?*" in which he proves that one need not have a musical ear (he hadn't) to be enslaved by such a voice as hers, any more than the eye for beauty (this he *had*) to fall the victim of "her celestial form and face." It is enough, he says, to be simply human! I forget in which journal this eloquent tribute appeared: it is not to be found in his collected works.

Our three heroes walked back to the boulevards, the only silent ones amid the throng that poured through the Rue St. Honoré, as the Cirque des Bashibazoucks emptied itself of its over-excited audience.

They went arm-in-arm, as usual; but this time Little Billee was in the middle. He wished to feel on each side of him the warm and genial contact of his two beloved old friends. It

seemed as if they had suddenly been restored to him, after five long years of separation; his heart was overflowing with affection for them, too full to speak just yet! Overflowing, indeed, with the love of love, the love of life, the love of death—the love of all that is, and ever was and ever will be; just as in his old way.

He could have hugged them both in the open street, before the whole world; and the delight of it was that this was no dream; about that there was no mistake. He was himself again at last, after five years, and wide awake; and he owed it all to Trilby!

And what did he feel for Trilby? He couldn't tell yet. It was too vast as yet to be measured; and, alas! it was weighted with such a burden of sorrow and regret that he might well put off the thought of it a little while longer, and gather in what bliss he might: like the man whose hearing has been restored after long years, he would revel in the mere physical delight of hearing for a space, and not go out of his way as yet to listen for the bad news that was already in the air, and would come to roost quite soon enough.

Taffy and the Laird were silent also; Trilby's voice was still in their ears and hearts, her image in their eyes, and utter bewilderment still oppressed them and kept them dumb.

It was a warm and balmy night, almost like mid-summer; and they stopped at the first café they met on the Boulevard de la Madeleine (*comme autrefois*), and ordered bocks of beer, and sat at a little table on the pavement, the only one unoccupied; for the café was already crowded, the hum of lively talk was great, and "La Svengali" was in every mouth.

The Laird was the first to speak. He emptied his bock at a draught, and called for another, and lit a cigar and said: "I don't believe it was Trilby, after all!" It was the first time her name had been mentioned between them that evening—and for five years!

"Good heavens!" said Taffy. "Can you doubt it?"

"Oh, yes, that was Trilby!" said Little Billee.

Then the Laird proceeded to explain that, putting aside the impossibility of Trilby's ever being taught to sing in tune, and her well-remembered loathing for Svengali, he had narrowly scanned her face through his opera-glass, and found that in spite of a likeness quite marvellous, there were well-marked differences. Her face was narrower and longer, her eyes larger, and their expression not the same; then she seemed taller and stouter, and her shoulders broader and more drooping, and so forth.

But the others wouldn't hear of it, and declared they even recognised the peculiar twang of her old speaking voice in the voice she now sang with, especially when she sang low down. And they all three fell to discussing the wonders of her performance like everybody else all round; Little Billee leading, with an eloquence and a seeming of technical musical knowledge that quite impressed them and made them feel happy and at ease; for they were anxious for his sake about the effect this sudden and so unexpected sight of her would have upon him after all that had passed.

He seemed transcendently happy and elate, and looked at them both with quite a new light in his eyes, as if all the music he had heard had trebled not only his joy in being alive, but his pleasure at being with them. Evidently he had quite outgrown his old passion for her, and that was a comfort indeed!

But Little Billee knew better.

He knew that his old passion for her had all come back, and was so overwhelming and immense that he could not feel it just yet, nor yet the hideous pangs of a jealousy so consuming that it would burn up his life. He gave himself another twenty-four hours.

But he had not to wait so long. He woke up after a short, uneasy sleep that very night, to find that the flood was over him; and he realised how hopelessly, desperately, wickedly, insanely he loved this woman, who might have been his, but was now the wife of another man; a greater than he, and one to whom she owed it that she was more glorious than any other woman on earth—a queen among queens—a goddess! for what was any earthly throne compared to that she established in the hearts and souls of all who came within the sight and hearing of her; beautiful as she was besides—beautiful, beautiful! And what must be her love for the man who had taught her and trained her and revealed her towering genius to herself and to the world!—a man resplendent also, handsome and tall and commanding—a great artist from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot!

And the remembrance of them—hand in hand, master and pupil, husband and wife—smiling and bowing in the face of all that splendid tumult they had called forth and could not quell, stung and tortured and maddened him so that he could not lie still, but got up and raged and rampaged up and down his hot, narrow, stuffy bedroom, and longed for his old familiar brain-disease to come back and narcotise his trouble, and be his friend, and stay with him till he died!

Where was he to fly for relief from such new memories as these, which would never cease; and the old memories, and all the glamour and grace of them that had been so suddenly called out of the grave? And how could he escape, now that he felt the sight of her face and the sound of her voice would be a craving—a daily want—like that of some poor starving outcast for warmth and meat and drink?

And little innocent, pathetic, ineffable, well-remembered sweetnesses of her changing face kept painting themselves on his retina; and incomparable tones of this new thing, her voice,

her infinite voice, went ringing in his head, till he all but shrieked aloud in his agony.

And then the poisoned and delirious sweetness of those mad kisses,

" by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others " !

And then the gruesome physical jealousy, that miserable inheritance of all artistic sons of Adam, that plague and torment of the dramatic, plastic imagination, which can idealise so well, and yet realise, alas ! so keenly. After three or four hours spent like this, he could stand it no longer ; madness was lying his way. So he hurried on a garment and went and knocked at Taffy's door.

" Good God ! What's the matter with you ? " exclaimed the good Taffy, as Little Billee tumbled into his room, calling out :

" Oh, Taffy, Taffy, I've g-g-gone mad, I think ! " And then, shivering all over, and stammering incoherently, he tried to tell his friend what was the matter with him, with great simplicity.

Taffy, in much alarm, slipped on his trousers and made Little Billee get into his bed, and sat by his side holding his hand. He was greatly perplexed, fearing the recurrence of another attack like that of five years back. He didn't dare leave him for an instant to wake the Laird and send for a doctor.

Suddenly Little Billee buried his face in the pillow and began to sob, and some instinct told Taffy this was the best thing that could happen. The boy had always been highly-strung, emotional, over-excitable, over-sensitive, and quite uncontrolled, a cry-baby sort of chap, who had never been to school. It was all a part of his genius, and also a part of his charm. It would do him good once more to have a good cry after five years ! After a while Little Billee grew quieter, and then suddenly he said : " What a miserable ass you must think me, what an unmanly duffer ! "

" Why, my friend ? "

" Why, for going on in this idiotic way. I really couldn't help it. I went mad, I tell you. I've been walking up and down my room all night, till everything seemed to go round."

" So have I."

" You ? What for ? "

" The very same reason."

" *What !* "

" I was just as fond of Trilby as you were. Only she happened to prefer *you*."

" *What !* ' cried Little Billee again. " *You* were fond of Trilby ? "

" I believe you, my boy ! "

" In *love* with her ? "

" I believe you, my boy ! "

" She never knew it, then ! "

" Oh, yes, she did."

" She never told me, then ! "

" Didn't she ? That's like her. *I* told *her*, at all events. I asked her to marry me."

" Well—I *am* damned ! When ? "

" That day we took her to Meudon, with Jeannot, and dined at the garde champêtre's, and she danced the cancan with Sandy."

" Well—I *am*—— And she *refused* you ? "

" Apparently so."

" Well, I—— Why on earth did she refuse you ? "

" Oh, I suppose she'd already begun to fancy *you*, my friend. *Il y en a toujours un autre !* "

" Fancy *me*—prefer *me*—to *you ?* "

" Well, yes. It *does* seem odd—eh, old fellow ? But there's no accounting for tastes, you know. She's built on such an ample scale herself, I suppose, that she likes little 'uns—contrast, you see. She's very maternal, I think. Besides, you're a smart little chap ; and you ain't half bad ; and you've got brains and talent, and lots of cheek, and all that. I'm rather a *ponderous* kind of party."

" Well—I *am* damned ! "

" I took it lying down, you see."

" Does the Laird know ? "

" No ; and I don't want him to—nor anybody else."

" Taffy, what a regular downright old trump you are ! "

" Glad you think so ; anyhow, we're both in the same boat, and we've got to make the best of it. She's another man's wife, and probably she's very fond of him. I'm sure she ought to be, cad as he is, after all he's done for her. So there's an end of it."

" Ah, there'll never be an end of it for *me*—never—never—oh, never, my God ! She would have married me but for my mother's meddling, and that stupid old ass, my uncle. What a wife ! Think of all she must have in her heart and brain, only to *sing* like that ! And, O Lord, how beautiful she is—a goddess ! Oh, the brow and cheek and chin, and the way her head's put on ! Did you *ever* see anything like it ? Oh, if only I hadn't written and told my mother I was going to marry her ! Why, we should have been man and wife for five years by this time—living at Barbizon—painting away like mad ! Oh, what a heavenly life ! Oh, curse all officious meddling with other people's affairs ! Oh, oh ! . . ."

" There you go again ! What's the good ? And where do *I* come in, my friend ? *I* should have been no better off, old fellow—worse than ever, I think."

Then there was a long silence.

At length Little Billee said :

" Taffy, I can't tell you what a trump you are. All I've ever thought of you—and God knows that's enough—will be nothing to what I shall always think of you after this."

" All right, old chap ! "

" And now I think *I'm* all right again, for a time—and I shall cut back to bed. Good night ! Thanks more than I can ever express ! " And Little Billee, restored to his balance, cut

back to his own bed just as the day was breaking.

¶

NEXT morning our three friends lay late abed, and breakfasted in their rooms.

They had all three passed "white nights"—even the Laird, who had tossed about and pressed a sleepless pillow till dawn, so excited had he been by the wonder of Trilby's reincarnation, so perplexed by his own doubts as to whether it was really Trilby or not.

And certain haunting tones of her voice, that voice so cruelly sweet, certain bits and bars and phrases of the music she had sung, unspeakable facilities of execution; sudden exotic warmths, fragrances, tendernesses, graces, depths and breadths; quick changes from grave to gay, from rough to smooth, from great metallic brazen clangours to soft golden suavities; all the varied modes of sound we try so vainly to borrow from vocal nature by means of wind and reed and string—all this new "Trilbyness" kept echoing in his brain all night (for he was of a nature deeply musical), and sleep had been impossible to him.

> "As when we dwell upon a word we know,
> Repeating, till the word we know so well
> Becomes a wonder, and we know not why."

so dwelt the Laird upon the poor old tune "Ben Bolt," which kept singing itself over and over again in his tired consciousness, and maddened him with novel, strange, unsuspected beauties such as he had never dreamed of in any earthly music.

It had become a wonder, and he knew not why!

They spent what was left of the morning at the Louvre, and tried to interest themselves in the "Marriage of Cana," and the "Woman at the Well," and Vandyck's man with the glove, and the little Princess of Velasquez, and Lisa Gioconda's smile; it was of no use trying. There was no sight worth looking at in all Paris but Trilby in her golden raiment; no other princess in the world; no smile but hers, when through her parted lips came bubbling Chopin's Impromptu. They had not long to stay in Paris, and they must drink of that bubbling fountain once more—*coûte que coûte!* They went to the Salle des Bashibazoucks, and found that all seats all over the house had been taken for days and weeks; and the "queue" at the door had already begun, and they had to give up all hopes of slaking this particular thirst.

Then they went and lunched perfunctorily, and talked desultorily over lunch, and read criticisms of La Svengali's *début* in the morning papers—a chorus of journalistic acclamation gone mad, a frenzied eulogy in every key—but nothing was good enough for them! Brand new words were wanted—another language!

Then they wanted a long walk, and could think of nowhere to go in all Paris—that immense Paris, where they had promised themselves to see so much that the week they were to spend there had seemed too short.

Looking in a paper, they saw it announced that the band of the Imperial Guides would play that afternoon in the Pré Catelan, Bois de Boulogne, and thought they might as well walk there as anywhere else, and walk back again in time to dine with the Passefils.

Outside the Pré Catelan they found a crowd of cabs and carriages, saddle-horses and grooms. One might have thought one's self in the height of the Paris season. They went in and strolled about here and there, and listened to the band, and they looked about and studied life, or tried to.

Suddenly they saw, sitting with three ladies (one of whom, the eldest, was in black), a very smart young officer, a Guide, all red and green and gold, and recognised their old friend Zouzou. They bowed, and he knew them at once, and jumped up and came to them and greeted them warmly, especially his old friend Taffy, whom he took to his mother—the lady in black—and introduced to the other ladies, the younger of whom (strangely unlike the rest of her country-women) was so lamentably, so pathetically plain that it would be brutal to attempt the cheap and easy task of describing her. It was Miss Lavinia Hunks, the famous American millionairess, and her mother. Then the good Zouzou came back and talked to the Laird and Little Billee.

Zouzou, in some subtle and indescribable way, had become very ducal indeed.

He looked extremely distinguished, for one thing, in his beautiful Guides' uniform, and was most gracefully and winningly polite. He inquired warmly after Mrs. and Miss Bagot, and begged Little Billee would recall him to their amiable remembrance when he saw them again. He expressed most sympathetically his delight to see Little Billee looking so strong and so well (Little Billee looked like a pallid little washed-out ghost, after his white night).

They talked of Dodor. He said how attached he was to Dodor, and always should be; but Dodor, it seemed, had made a great mistake in leaving the army and going into a retail business. He had done for himself! He should have stuck to the *dragons*—with a little patience and good conduct he would have "won his epaulet"—and then one might have arranged for him a good little marriage—*un parti convenable*—for he was "très joli garçon, Dodor! bonne tournure—et très gentiment né! C'est très ancien, les Rigolot—dans le Poitou, je crois—Lafarce, et tout ça; tout à fait bien!"

It was difficult to realise that this polished and discreet and somewhat patronising young man of the world was the jolly dog who had gone after Little Billee's hat on all fours in the Rue Vieille des Trois Mauvais Ladres and brought it back in his mouth—the Caryhatide!

Little Billee little knew that Monsieur le Duc de la Rochemartel-Boisségur had quite recently delighted a very small and select and most august imperial supper-party at Compiègne with this very story, not blinking a single detail of his own share in it—and had given a most touching and sympathetic description of "le joli petit peintre anglais qui s'appelait Litrebili, et ne pouvait pas se tenir sur ses jambes—et qui pleurait d'amour fraternel dans les bras de mon copain Dodor!"

"Ah! Monsieur Gontran, ce que je donnerais pour avoir vu ça!" had said the greatest lady in France; "un de mes zouaves—à quatre pattes—dans la rue—un chapeau dans la bouche—oh—c'est impayable!"

Zouzou kept these blackguard bohemian reminiscences for the imperial circle alone—to which it was suspected that he was secretly rallying himself. Among all outsiders—especially within the narrow precints of the cream of the noble Faubourg (which remained aloof from the Tuileries)—he was a very proper and gentlemanlike person indeed, as his brother had been—and, in his mother's fond belief, "très bien pensant, très bien vu, à Frohsdofr et à Rome."

He did not present Little Billee and the Laird to his mother, nor to Mrs. and Miss Hunks; that honour was reserved for "the Man of Blood" alone; nor did he ask where they were staying, nor invite them to call on him. But in parting he expressed the immense pleasure it had given him to meet them again, and the hope he had of some day shaking their hands in London.

As the friends walked back to Paris together, it transpired that "the Man of Blood" had been invited by Madame Duchesse Mère (Maman Duchesse, as Zouzou called her) to dine with her next day, and meet the Hunkses at a furnished apartment she had taken in the Place Vendôme; for they had let (to the Hunkses) the Hôtel de la Rochemartel in the Rue de Lille; they had also been obliged to let their place in the country, le château de Boisségur (to Monsieur Despoires, or "des Poires," as he chose to spell himself on his visiting cards—the famous soap manufacturer—and whose only son, by the way, soon after married Mademoiselle Jeanne-Adélaide d'Amaury-Brissac de Roncesvaulx de Boisségur de la Rochemartel).

"Il ne fait pas gras chez nous à présent—je vous assure!" Madame Duchesse Mère had pathetically said to Taffy—but had given him to understand that things would be very much better for her son in the event of his marriage with Miss Hunks.

"Good heavens!" said Little Billee, on hearing this; "that grotesque little bogey in blue? Why, she's deformed—she squints—she's a dwarf, and looks like an idiot! Millions or no millions, the man who marries her is a felon! As long as there are stones to break and a road to break them on, the able-bodied man who marries a woman like that for anything but pity and kindness—and even then—dishonours himself, insults his ancestry, and inflicts on his descendants a wrong that nothing will ever redeem—he nips them in the bud—he blasts them for ever! He ought to be cut by his fellow-men—sent to Coventry—to jail—to penal servitude for life! He ought to have a separate hell to himself when he dies—he ought to——"

"Shut up, you blaspheming little ruffian!" said the Laird. "Where do *you* expect to go to, yourself, with such frightful sentiments? And what would become of your beautiful old twelfth-century dukedoms, with a hundred yards of back frontage opposite the Louvre, on a beautiful historic river, and a dozen beautiful historic names, and no money—if *you* had your way?" and the Laird wunk his historic wink.

"Twelfth-century dukedoms be damned!" said Taffy, *au grand sérieux*, as usual. "Little Billee's quite right, and Zouzou makes me sick! Besides, what does she marry *him* for—not for his beauty, either, I guess! She's his fellow-criminal, his deliberate accomplice, *particeps delicti*, accessory before the act and after! She has no right to marry at all! tar and feathers and a rail for both of them—and for Maman Duchesse, too—and I suppose that's why I refused her invitation to dinner! And now let's go and dine with Dodor . . . anyhow, Dodor's young woman doesn't marry him for a dukedom—or even his 'de'—*mais bien pour ses beaux yeux!* And if the Rigolots of the future turn out less nice to look at than their sire, and not quite so amusing, they will probably be a great improvement on him in many other ways. There's room enough—and to spare!"

"'Ear, 'ear!" said Little Billee (who always grew flippant when Taffy got on his high horse). "Your 'ealth and song, sir—them's my sentiments to a T! What shall we 'ave the pleasure of drinkin', after that wery nice 'armony?"

After which they walked on in silence, each no doubt, musing on the general contrariness of things, and imagining what splendid little Wynnes, or Bagots, or M'Allisters might have been ushered into a decadent world for its regeneration if fate had so willed it that a certain magnificent and singularly gifted grisette, etc., etc., etc. . . .

Mrs. and Miss Hunks passed them as they walked along, in a beautiful blue barouche with C-springs; Maman Duchesse passed them in a hired fly; Zouzou passed them on horseback; "tout Paris" passed them; but they were none the wiser, and agreed that the show was not a patch on that in Hyde Park during the London season.

When they reached the Place de la Concorde it was that lovely hour of a fine autumn day in beautiful bright cities when all the lamps

are lit in the shops and streets and under the trees, and it is still daylight—a quickly fleeting joy; and as a special treat on this particular occasion the sun set, and up rose the yellow moon over eastern Paris, and floated above the chimney-pots of the Tuileries.

They stopped to gaze at the homeward procession of cabs and carriages, as they used to do in the old times. Tout Paris was still passing; tout Paris is very long.

They stood among a little crowd of sightseers like themselves, Little Billee right in front—in the road.

Presently a magnificent open carriage came by—more magnificent than even the Hunkses', with liveries and harness quite vulgarly resplendent—almost Napoleonic.

Lolling back in it lay Monsieur et Madame Svengali—he with his broad-brimmed felt sombrero over his long black curls, wrapped in costly furs, smoking his big cigar of the Havana.

By his side La Svengali—also in sables—with a large black velvet hat on, her light brown hair done up in a huge knot on the nape of her neck. She was rouged and pearl-powdered, and her eyes were blackened beneath, and thus made to look twice their size; but in spite of all such disfigurements she was a most splendid vision, and caused quite a little sensation in the crowd as she came slowly by.

¶

LITTLE Billee's heart was in his mouth. He caught Svengali's eye, and saw him speak to her. She turned her head and looked at him standing there—they both did. Little Billee bowed. She stared at him with a cold stare of disdain, and cut him dead—so did Svengali. And as they passed he heard them both snigger—she with a little high-pitched flippant snigger worthy of a London barmaid.

Little Billee was utterly crushed, and everything seemed turning round.

The Laird and Taffy had seen it all without losing a detail. The Svengalis had not even looked their way. The Laird said:

"It's not Trilby—I swear! She could *never* have done that—it's not *in* her! And it's another face altogether—I'm sure of it!"

Taffy was also staggered and in doubt. They caught hold of Little Billee, each by an arm, and walked him off to the boulevards. He was quite demoralised, and wanted not to dine at Passefil's. He wanted to go straight home at once. He longed for his mother as he used to long for her when he was in trouble as a small boy and she was away from home—longed for her desperately—to hug her and hold her and be held, for his own sake and hers; all his old love for her had come back in full—with what arrears! All his old love for his sister, for his old home.

When they went back to the hotel to dress (for Dodor had begged them to put on their best evening war-paint, so as to impress his future mother-in-law), Little Billee became fractious and intractable. And it was only on Taffy's promising that he would go all the way to Devonshire with him on the morrow and stay with him there, that he could be got to dress and dine.

The huge Taffy lived entirely by his affections, and he hadn't many to live by—the Laird, Trilby and Little Billee.

Trilby was unattainable, the Laird was quite strong and independent enough to get on by himself, and Taffy had concentrated all his faculties of protection and affection on Little Billee, and was equal to any burden or responsibility all this instinctive young fathering might involve.

In the first place, Little Billee had always been able to do quite easily, and better than any one else in the world, the very things Taffy most longed to do himself and couldn't, and this inspired the good Taffy with a reverence and wonder he could not have expressed in words.

Then Little Billee was physically small and weak, and incapable of self-control. Then he was generous, amiable, affectionate, transparent as crystal, without an atom of either egotism or conceit; and had a gift of amusing you and interesting you by his talk (and its complete sincerity) that never palled; and even his silence was charming—one felt so sure of him—so there was hardly any sacrifice, little or big, that big Taffy was not ready and glad to make for Little Billee. On the other hand, there lay deep down under Taffy's surface irascibility and earnestness about trifles, a long-suffering patience, a real humility, a robustness of judgement, a sincerity and all-roundness, a completeness of sympathy, that made him very good to trust and safe to lean upon. Then his powerful, impressive aspect, his great stature, the gladiator-like poise of his small round head on his big neck and shoulders, his huge deltoids and deep chest and slender loins, his clean-cut ankles and wrists, all the long and bold and highly-finished athletic shapes of him, that easy grace of strength that made all his movements a pleasure to watch, and any garment look well when he wore it—all this was a perpetual feast to the quick, prehensile, æsthetic eye. And then he had such a solemn, earnest, lovable way of bending pokers round his neck and breaking them on his arm, and jumping his own height (or near it), and lifting up armchairs by one leg with one hand, and what not else!

So that there was hardly any sacrifice, little or big, that Little Billee would not accept from big Taffy as a mere matter of course—a fitting and proper tribute rendered by bodily strength to genius.

*Par nobile fratrum*—well met and well mated for fast and long-enduring friendship.

The family banquet at Monsieur Passefil's would have been dull but for the irrepressible Dodor, and still more for the Laird of Cockpen, who rose to the occasion and surpassed himself in geniality, drollery and eccentricity of French grammar and accent. Monsieur Passefil was also a droll in his way, and had the quickly familiar, jocose facetiousness that seems to belong to the successful middle-aged bourgeois all over the world, when he's not pompous instead (he can even be both sometimes).

Madame Passefil was not jocose. She was much impressed by the aristocratic splendour of Taffy, the romantic melancholy and refinement of Little Billee, and their quiet and dignified politeness. She always spoke of Dodor as Monsieur de Lafarce, though the rest of the family (and one or two friends who had been invited) always called him Monsieur Théodore, and he was officially known as Monsieur Rigolet.

Whenever Madame Passefil addressed him or spoke of him in this aristocratic manner (which happened very often), Dodor would wink at his friends, with his tongue in his cheek. It seemed to amuse him beyond measure.

Mademoiselle Ernestine was evidently too much in love to say anything, and seldom took her eyes off Monsieur Théodore, whom she had never seen in evening dress before. It must be owned that he looked very nice—more ducal than even Zouzou—and to be Madame de Lafarce *en perspective*, and the future owner of such a brilliant husband as Dodor, was enough to turn a stronger little bourgeois head than Mademoiselle Ernestine's.

She was not beautiful, but healthy, well grown, well brought up, and presumably of a sweet, kind and amiable disposition—an *ingénue* fresh from her convent—innocent as a child, no doubt; and it was felt that Dodor had done better for himself (and for his race) than Monsieur le Duc. Little Dodors need have no fear.

After dinner the ladies and gentlemen left the dining-room together and sat in a pretty salon overlooking the boulevard, where cigarettes were allowed, and there was music Mademoiselle Ernestine laboriously played "Les Cloches du Monastère" (by Monsieur Lefébure-Wély, if I'm not mistaken). It's the most bourgeois piece of music I know.

Then Dodor, with his sweet high voice, so strangely pathetic and true, sang little French songs of innocence to his future wife's conscientious accompaniment—to the immense delight, also, of all his future family, who were almost in tears—and to the great amusement of the Laird, at whom he winked in the most pathetic parts, putting his forefinger to the side of his nose, like Noah Claypole in "Oliver Twist."

The wonder of the hour, La Svengali, was discussed, of course; it was unavoidable. But our friends did not think it necessary to reveal that she was "la grande Trilby." That would soon transpire by itself.

And, indeed, before the month was a week older the papers were full of nothing else.

Madame Svengali—"la grande Trilby"—was the only daughter of the honourable and reverend Sir Lord O'Ferrall.

She had run away from the primeval forests and lonely marshes of le Dublin, to lead a free-and easy life among the artists of the Quartier Latin of Paris—*une vie de bohème!*

She was the Venus Anadyomene from top to toe.

She was *blanche comme neige, avec un volcan dans le cœur.*

Casts of her alabaster feet could be had at Brucciani's, in the Rue de la Souricière St. Denis. (He made a fortune.)

Monsieur Ingres had painted her left foot on the wall of a studio in the Place St. Anatole des Arts; and an eccentric Scotch milord (le Comte de Pencock) had bought the house containing the flat containing the studio containing the wall on which it was painted, had had the house pulled down, and the wall framed and glazed and sent to his castle of Edimbourg.

(This, unfortunately, was in excess of the truth. It was found impossible to execute the Laird's wish, on account of the material the wall was made of. So the Lord Count of Pencock—such was Madame Vinard's version of Sandy's nickname—had to forgo his purchase.)

Next morning our friends were in readiness to leave Paris; even the Laird had had enough of it, and longed to get back to his work again—a "Hari-Kari in Yokohama." (He had never been to Japan; but no more had anyone else in those early days.)

They had just finished breakfast, and were sitting in the courtyard of the hotel, which was crowded, as usual.

Little Billee went into the hotel post-office to despatch a note to his mother. Sitting sideways there at a small table, and reading letters, was Svengali—of all people in the world. But for these two and a couple of clerks the room was empty.

Svengali looked up; they were quite close together.

Little Billee, in his nervousness, began to shake, and half put out his hand, and drew it back again, seeing the look of hate on Svengali's face.

Svengali jumped up, put his letters together, and passing by Little Billee on his way to the door, called him "verfluchter Schweinhund," and deliberately spat in his face.

Little Billee was paralysed for a second or two; then he ran after Svengali and caught him just at the top of the marble stairs, and kicked him and knocked off his hat, and made him drop all his letters. Svengali turned round and struck him over the mouth and made it bleed, and Little Billee hit out like a fury, but with no

effect; he couldn't reach high enough, for Svengali was well over six feet.

There was a crowd round them in a minute, including the beautiful old man in the court suit and gold chain, who called out:

"Vite, vite! Un commissaire de police!"—a cry that was echoed all over the place.

Taffy saw the row and shouted: "Bravo, little 'un!" and jumping up from his table, jostled his way through the crowd; and Little Billee, bleeding and gasping and perspiring and stammering, said:

"He spat in my face, Taffy—damn him! I'd never even spoken to him—not a word, I swear!"

Svengali had not reckoned on Taffy's being there; he recognised him at once, and turned white.

Taffy, who had dogskin gloves on, put out his right hand, and deftly seized Svengali's nose between his fore and middle fingers and nearly pulled it off, and swung his head two or three times backward and forward by it, and then from side to side, Svengali holding on to his wrist; and then, letting him go, gave him a sounding open-handed smack on his right cheek—and a smack on the face from Taffy (even in play) was no joke, I'm told; it made one smell brimstone, and see and hear things that didn't exist.

Svengali gasped worse than Little Billee, and couldn't speak for a while. Then he said:

"Lâche—grand lâche! Che fous enferrai mes témoins!"

"At your orders!" said Taffy, in beautiful French, and drew out his card-case and gave him his card in quite the orthodox French manner, adding: "I shall be here till to-morrow at twelve—but that is my London address, in case I don't hear from you before I leave. I'm sorry, but you really mustn't spit, you know—it's not done. I will come to you whenever you send for me—even if I have to come from the end of the world."

"Très bien, très bien!" said a military-looking old gentleman close by, who gave Taffy *his* card, in case he might be of any service—and who seemed quite delighted at the row—and indeed it was really pleasant to note with what a smooth, flowing, spontaneity the good Taffy could always improvise these swift little acts of summary retributive justice; no hurry or scurry or flurry whatever—not an inharmonious gesture, not an infelicitous line—the very poetry of violence, and almost its only excuse!

Whatever it was worth, this was Taffy's special gift, and it never failed him at a pinch.

When the commissaire de police arrived, all was over. Svengali had gone away in a cab, and Taffy put himself at the disposition of the commissaire.

They went into the post-office and discussed it all with the old military gentleman, and the major-domo in velvet, and the two clerks who had seen the original insult. And all that was required of Taffy and his friends for the present was "their names, prenames, titles, qualities, age, address, nationality, occupation," etc.

"C'est une affaire qui s'arrangera autrement, et autre part!" had said the military gentleman, monsieur le général Comte de la Tour-aux-Loups.

So it blew over quite simply, and all that day a fierce unholy joy burned in Taffy's choleric blue eye.

Not, indeed, that he had any wish to injure Trilby's husband, or meant to do him any grievous bodily harm, whatever happened. But he was glad to have given Svengali a lesson in manners.

That Svengali should injure *him* never entered into his calculations for a moment. Besides, he didn't believe Svengali would show fight; and in this he was not mistaken.

¶

BUT he had, for hours, the feel of that long, thick shapely Hebrew nose being kneaded between his gloved knuckles, and a pleasing sense of the effectiveness of the tweak he had given it. So he went about chewing the cud of that heavenly remembrance all day, till reflection brought remorse, and he felt sorry; for he was really the mildest-mannered man that ever broke a head!

Only the sight of Little Billee's blood (which had been made to flow by such an unequal antagonist) had roused the old Adam.

No message came from Svengali to ask for the names and addresses of Taffy's seconds; so Dodor and Zouzou were left undisturbed; and our three musketeers went back to London clean of blood, whole of limb and heartily sick of Paris.

Little Billee stayed with his mother and sister in Devonshire till Christmas, Taffy staying at the village inn.

It was Taffy who told Mrs. Bagot about La Svengali's all but certain identity with Trilby, after Little Billee had gone to bed, tired and worn out, the night of their arrival.

"Good heavens!" said poor Mrs. Bagot. "Why, that's the new singing woman who's coming over here! There's an article about her in to-day's *Times*. It says she's a wonder, and that there's no one like her! Surely that can't be the Miss O'Ferral I saw in Paris!"

"It seems impossible—but I'm almost certain it is—and Willy has no doubts in the matter. On the other hand, M'Allister declares it isn't."

"Oh, what trouble! So *that's* why poor Willy looks so ill and miserable! It's all come back again. Could she sing at all then, when you knew her in Paris?"

"Not a note—her attempts at singing were quite grotesque."

"Is she still very beautiful?"

"Oh, yes; there's no doubt about that; more than ever!"

"And her singing—is that so very wonderful? I remember that she had a beautiful voice in speaking."

"Wonderful? Ah, yes; I never heard or dreamed the like of it. Grisi, Alboni, Patti—not one of them to be mentioned in the same breath!"

"Good heavens! Why, she must be simply irresistible! I wonder you're not in love with her yourself. How dreadful these sirens are, wrecking the peace of families!"

"You mustn't forget that she gave way at once at a word from you, Mrs. Bagot; and she was very fond of Willy. She wasn't a siren then."

"Oh, yes—oh, yes, that's true—she behaved very well—she did her duty—I can't deny that! You must try and forgive me, Mr. Wynne—although I can't forgive *her*—that dreadful illness of poor Willy's—that bitter time in Paris——"

And Mrs. Bagot began to cry, and Taffy forgave. "Oh, Mr. Wynne, let us still hope that there's some mistake—that it's only somebody like her! Why, she's coming to sing in London after Christmas! My poor boy's infatuation will only increase. What *shall* I do?"

"Well—she's another man's wife, you see. So Willy's infatuation is bound to burn itself out as soon as he fully recognises that important fact. Besides, she cut him dead in the Champs Elysées—and her husband and Willy had a row next day at the hotel, and cuffed and kicked each other—that's rather a bar to any future intimacy, I think."

"Oh, Mr. Wynne, my son cuffing and kicking a man whose wife he's in love with! Good heavens!"

"Oh, it was all right—the man had grossly insulted him, and Willy behaved like a brick, and got the best of it in the end, and nothing came of it. I saw it all."

"Oh, Mr. Wynne—and you didn't interfere?"

"Oh, yes, I interfered—everybody interfered. It was all right, I assure you. No bones were broken on either side, and there was no nonsense about calling out, or swords or pistols, and all that."

"Thank Heaven!"

In a week or two Little Billee grew more like himself again, and painted endless studies of rocks and cliffs and sea—and Taffy painted with him, and was very content. The vicar and Little Billee patched up their feud. The vicar also took an immense fancy to Taffy, whose cousin, Sir Oscar Wynne, he had known at college, and lost no opportunity of being hospitable and civil to him. And his daughter was away in Algiers.

And all "the nobility and gentry" of the neighbourhood, including "the poor dear marquis" (one of whose sons was in Taffy's old regiment), were civil and hospitable also to the two painters—and Taffy got as much sport as he wanted, and became immensely popular. And they had, on the whole, a very good time till Christmas, and a very pleasant Christmas, if not an exuberantly merry one.

After Christmas Little Billee insisted on going back to London—to paint a picture for the Royal Academy; and Taffy went with him; and there was dulness in the house of Bagot—and many misgivings in the maternal heart of its mistress.

And people of all kinds, high and low, from the family at the Court to the fishermen on the little pier and their wives and children, missed the two genial painters, who were the friends of everybody, and made such beautiful sketches of their beautiful coast.

## ¶

LA SVENGALI has arrived in London. Her name is in every mouth. Her photograph is in the shop windows. She is to sing at J——'s monster concerts next week. She was to have sung sooner, but it seems some hitch has occurred—a quarrel between Monsieur Svengali and his first violin, who is a very important person.

A crowd of people as usual, only bigger, is assembled in front of the windows of the Stereoscopic Company in Regent Street, gazing at presentments of Madame Svengali in all sizes and costumes. She is very beautiful—there is no doubt of that; and the expression of her face is sweet and kind and sad, and of such a distinction that one feels an imperial crown would become her even better than her modest little coronet of golden stars. One of the photographs represents her in classical dress, with her left foot on a little stool, in something of the attitude of the Venus of Milo, except that her hands are clasped behind her back; and the foot is bare but for a Greek sandal, and so smooth and delicate and charming, and with so rhythmical a set and curl of the five slender toes (the big one slightly tip-tilted and well apart from its longer and slighter and more aquiline neighbour), that this presentment of her sells quicker than all the rest.

And a little man who, with two bigger men, has just forced his way in front says to one of his friends: "Look, Sandy, look—*the foot! Now* have you got any doubts?"

"Oh, yes, those are Trilby's toes, sure enough," says Sandy. And they all go in and purchase largely.

As far as I have been able to discover, the row between Svengali and his first violin had occurred at a rehearsal in Drury Lane Theatre.

Svengali, it seems, had never been quite the same since the 15th of October previous, and that was the day he had got his face slapped

and his nose tweaked by Taffy in Paris. He had become short-tempered and irritable, especially with his wife (if she *was* his wife). Svengali, it seems, had reasons for passionately hating Little Billee.

He had not seen him for five years—not since the Christmas festivity in the Place St. Anatole, when they had sparred together after supper, and Svengali's nose had got in the way on this occasion, and had been made to bleed; but that was not why he hated Little Billee.

When he caught sight of him standing on the curb in the Place de la Concorde and watching the procession of "tout Paris," he knew him directly, and all his hate flared up; he cut him dead, and made his wife do the same.

Next morning he saw him again in the hotel post-office, looking small and weak and flurried, and apparently alone; and being an Oriental Israelite Hebrew Jew, he had not been able to resist the temptation of spitting in his face, since he must not throttle him to death.

The minute he had done this he had regretted the folly of it. Little Billee had run after him and kicked and struck him and he had returned the blow and drawn blood; and then, suddenly and quite unexpectedly had come upon the scene that apparition so loathed and dreaded of old—the pig-headed Yorkshireman—the huge British philistine, the irresponsible bull, the junker, the ex-Crimean, Front-de-Bœuf, who had always reminded him of the brutal and contemptuous sword-clanking, spur-jingling aristocrats of his own country—ruffians that treated Jews like dogs. Callous as he was to the woes of others, the self-indulgent and highly-strung musician was extra sensitive about himself—a very bundle of nerves—and especially sensitive to pain and rough usage, and by no means physically brave. The stern, invincible blue eye of the hated northern Gentile had cowed him at once. And that violent tweaking of his nose, that heavy open-handed blow on his face, had so shaken and demoralised him that he had never recovered from it.

He was thinking about it always—night and day—and constantly dreaming at night that he was being tweaked and slapped over again by a colossal nightmare Taffy, and waking up in agonies of terror, rage and shame. All healthy sleep had forsaken him.

Moreover, he was much older than he looked—nearly fifty—and far from sound. His life had been a long, hard struggle.

He had for his wife, slave and pupil a fierce, jealous kind of affection that was a source of endless torment to him; for indelibly graven in her heart, which he wished to occupy alone, was the never-fading image of the little English painter, and of this she made no secret.

Gecko no longer cared for the master. All Gecko's doglike devotion was concentrated on the slave and pupil, whom he worshipped with a fierce but pure and unselfish passion. The only living soul that Svengali could trust was the old Jewess who lived with them—his relative—but even she had come to love the pupil as much as the master.

On the occasion of this rehearsal at Drury Lane he (Svengali) was conducting and Madame Svengali was singing. He interrupted her several times, angrily and most unjustly, and told her she was singing out of tune, "like a verfluchter tomcat," which was quite untrue. She was singing beautifully "Home, Sweet Home."

Finally he struck her two or three smart blows on her knuckles with his little bâton, and she fell on her knees, weeping and crying out:

"Oh, oh, Svengali! Ne me battez pas, mon ami—je fais tout ce que je peux!"

On which little Gecko had suddenly jumped up and struck Svengali on the neck near the collar-bone, and then it was seen that he had a little bloody knife in his hand, and blood flowed from Svengali's neck, and at the sight of it Svengali had fainted; and Madame Svengali had taken his head on her lap, looking dazed and stupefied, as in a waking dream.

Gecko had been disarmed, but as Svengali recovered from his faint and was taken home, the police had not been sent for, and the affair was hushed up, and a public scandal avoided. But La Svengali's first appearance, to Monsieur

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J——'s despair, had to be put off for a week. For Svengali would not allow her to sing without him; nor, indeed, would he be parted from her for a minute, or trust her out of his sight.

The wound was a slight one. The doctor who attended Svengali described the wife as being quite imbecile, do doubt from grief and anxiety. But she never left her husband's bedside for a moment, and had the obedience and devotion of a dog.

When the night came round for the postponed *début*, Svengali was allowed by the doctor to go to the theatre, but he was absolutely forbidden to conduct. His grief and anxiety at this were uncontrollable; he raved like a madman; and Monsieur J—— was almost as bad.

Monsieur J—— had been conducting the Svengali band at rehearsals during the week, in the absence of its master—an easy task. It had been so thoroughly drilled and knew its business so well that it could almost conduct itself, and it had played all the music it had to play (much of which consisted of accompaniments to La Svengali's songs) many times before. Her *répertoire* was immense, and Svengali had written these orchestral scores with great care.

¶

ON the famous night it was arranged that Svengali should sit in a box alone, exactly opposite his wife's place on the platform, where she could see him well; and a code of simple signals was arranged between him and Monsieur J—— and the band, so that virtually he might conduct, himself, from his box, should any hesitation or hitch occur. This arrangement was rehearsed the day before (a Sunday) and had turned out quite successfully, and La Svengali had sung in perfection in the empty theatre.

When Monday evening arrived everything seemed to be going smoothly; the house was soon crammed to suffocation, all but the middle box on the grand pier. It was not a promenade concert, and the pit was turned into guinea stalls (the promenade concerts were to begin a week later).

Right in the middle of these stalls sat the Laird and Taffy and Little Billee.

The band came in by degrees and tuned their instruments.

Eyes were constantly being turned to the empty box, and people wondered what royal personages would appear.

Monsieur J—— took his place amid immense applause, and bowed in his inimitable way, looking often at the empty box.

Then he tapped and waved his bâton, and the band played its Hungarian dance music with immense success; when this was over there was a pause, and soon some signs of impatience from the gallery. Monsieur J—— had disappeared.

Taffy stood up, his back to the orchestra, looking round.

Someone came into the empty box and stood for a moment in front, gazing at the house. A tall man, deathly pale, with long black hair and a beard.

It was Svengali.

He caught sight of Taffy and met his eyes, and Taffy said: "Good God! Look! Look!"

Then Little Billee and the Laird got up and looked.

And Svengali for a moment glared at them. And the expression of his face was so terrible with wonder, rage, and fear that they were quite appalled—and then he sat down, still glaring at Taffy, the whites of his eyes showing at the top and his teeth bared in a spasmodic grin of hate.

Then thunders of applause filled the house, and turning round and seating themselves, Taffy and Little Billee and the Laird saw Trilby being led by J—— down the platform, between the players, to the front, her face smiling rather vacantly, her eyes anxiously intent on Svengali in his box.

She made her bows to right and left just as she had done in Paris.

The band struck up the opening bars of "Ben Bolt," with which she was announced to make her *début*.

She still stared—but she didn't sing—and they played the little symphony three times.

One could hear Monsieur J—— in a hoarse, anxious whisper saying:

"Mais chantez donc, madame—pour l'amour de Dieu, commencez donc—commencez!"

She turned round with an extraordinary expression of face, and said:

"Chanter? Pourquoi donc voulez-vous que je chante moi? Chanter quoi, alors?"

"Mais 'Ben Bolt,' parbleu—chantez!"

"Ah—'Ben Bolt!' oui—je connais ça!"

Then the band began again.

And she tried, but failed to begin herself. She turned round and said:

"Comment diable voulez-vous que je chante avec tout ce train qu'ils font, ces diables de musiciens!"

"Mais, mon Dieu, madame—qu'est-ce que vous avez donc?" cried Monsieur J——.

J'ai que j'aime mieux chanter sans toute cette satanée musique, parbleu! J'aime mieux chanter toute seule!"

"Sans musique, alors—mais chantez—chantez!"

The band was stopped—the house was in a state of indescribable wonder and suspense.

She looked all round, and down at herself, and fingered her dress. Then she looked up to the chandelier with a tender, sentimental smile, and began:

"Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?
Sweet Alice with hair so brown,
Who wept with delight when you gave her a smile——"

She had not got further than this when the whole house was in an uproar—shouts from the gallery—shouts of laughter, hoots, hisses, cat-calls, cock-crows.

She stopped and glared like a brave lioness, and called out:

"Qu'est-ce que vous avez donc, tous! tas de vieilles pommes cuites que vous êtes! Est-ce qu'on a peur de vous?" And then, suddenly:

"Why, you're all English, aren't you? What's all the row about? What have you brought me here for? What have *I* done, I should like to know?"

And in asking these questions the depth and splendour of her voice were so extraordinary—its tone so pathetically feminine, yet so full of hurt and indignant command, that the tumult was stilled for a moment.

It was the voice of some being from another world—some insulted daughter of a race more puissant and nobler than ours; a voice that seemed as if it could never utter a false note.

Then came a voice from the gods in answer:

"Oh, ye're Henglish, har yer? Why don't yer sing as yer *hought* to sing—yer've got *voice* enough, any'ow! Why don't yer sing in *tune?*"

"Sing in *tune!*" cried Trilby. "I didn't want to sing at all—I only sang because I was asked to sing—that gentleman asked me—that French gentleman with the white waistcoat! I won't sing another note!"

"Oh, yer won't, won't yer! Then let us 'ave our money back, or we'll know what for!"

And again the din broke out, and the uproar was frightful.

Monsieur J—— screamed out across the theatre: "Svengali! Svengali! Qu'est-ce qu'elle a donc, votre femme? . . Elle est devenue folle!"

Indeed she had tried to sing "Ben Bolt," but had sung it in her old way—as she used to sing it in the Quartier Latin—the most lamentably grotesque performance ever heard out of a human throat!

"Svengali! Svengali!" shrieked poor Monsieur J——, gesticulating towards the box where Svengali was sitting, quite impossible, gazing at Monsieur J——, and smiling a ghastly, sardonic smile, a *rictus* of hate and triumphant revenge—as if he were saying:

"I've got the laugh of you *all* this time!"

Taffy, the Laird, Little Billee, the whole house were now staring at Svengali, and his wife was forgotten.

She stood vacantly looking at everybody and everything—the chandelier, Monsieur J——, Svengali in his box, the people in the stalls, in the gallery—and smiling as if the noisy scene amused and excited her.

"Svengali! Svengali! Svengali!"

The whole house took up the cry derisively. Monsieur J—— led Madame Svengali away; she seemed quite passive. That terrible figure of Svengali still sat, immovable, watching his wife's retreat—still smiling his ghastly smile. All eyes were now turned on him once more.

Monsieur J—— was then seen to enter his box with a policeman and two or three other men, one of them in evening dress. He quickly drew the curtains to; then, a minute or two after, he reappeared on the platform, bowing and scraping to the audience, as pale as death, and called for silence, the gentleman in evening dress by his side; and this person explained that a very dreadful thing had happened—that Monsieur Svengali had suddenly died in that box, of apoplexy, or heart disease; that his wife had seen it from her place on the stage, and had apparently gone out of her senses, which accounted for her extraordinary behaviour.

He added that the money would be returned at the doors, and begged the audience to disperse quietly.

Taffy, with his two friends behind him, forced his way to a stage door he knew. The Laird had no longer any doubts on the score of Trilby's identity—*this* Trilby, at all events.

Taffy knocked and thumped till the door was opened, and gave his card to the man who opened it, stating that he and his friends were old friends of Madame Svengali, and must see her at once.

The man tried to slam the door in his face, but Taffy pushed through, and shut it on the crowd outside, and insisted on being taken to Monsieur J—— immediately; and was so authoritative and big and looked such a swell that the man was cowed, and led him.

They passed an open door, through which they had a glimpse of a prostrate form on a table—a man partially undressed, and some men bending over him, doctors, probably.

That was the last they saw of Svengali.

Then they were taken to another door, and Monsieur J—— came out, and Taffy explained who they were, and they were admitted.

La Svengali was there, sitting in an armchair by the fire, while several of the band stood round gesticulating, and talking German or Polish or Yiddish. Gecko, on his knees, was alternately chafing her hands and feet. She seemed quite dazed.

But at the sight of Taffy she jumped up and rushed at him, saying: "Oh, Taffy, dear—oh, Taffy, what's it all about? Where on earth am I? What an age since we met!"

Then she caught sight of the Laird, and kissed him; and then she recognised Little Billee.

She looked at him for a long while in great surprise, and then shook hands with him.

"How pale you are! And so changed—you've got a moustache! What's the matter? Why are you all dressed in black, with white cravats, as if you were going to a funeral? Where's Svengali? I should like to go home!"

"Where—what do you call—home, I mean—where is it?" asked Taffy.

" C'est à l'Hotel de Normandie, dans le Haymarket. On va vous y conduire, madame !" said Monsieur J——.

" Oui—c'est ça ! " said Trilby—" Hôtel de Normandie—mais Svengali—où est-ce qu'il est ? "

" Hélas ! Madame—il est très malade ! "

" Malade ? Qu'est-ce qu'il a ? How funny you look, with your moustache, Little Billee ! Dear, *dear* Little Billee ! So pale, so very pale ! Are you ill, too ? Oh, I hope not ! How *glad* I am to see you again—you can't tell, though I promised your mother I wouldn't—never, never ! Where are we now, dear Little Billee ? "

Monsieur J—— seemed to have lost his head. He was constantly running in and out of the room, distracted. The bandsmen began to talk and try to explain, in incomprehensible French, to Taffy. Gecko seemed to have disappeared. It was a bewildering business—noises from outside, the tramp and bustle and shouts of the departing crowd, people running in and out and asking for Monsieur J——, policemen, firemen, and what not !

Then Little Billee, who had been exerting the most heroic self-control, suggested that Trilby should come to his house in Fitzroy Square, first of all, and be taken out of all this—and the idea struck Taffy as a happy one—and it was proposed to Monsieur J——, who saw that our three friends were old friends of Madame Svengali's, and people to be trusted ; and he was only too glad to be relieved of her, and gave his consent.

Little Billee and Taffy drove to Fitzroy Square to prepare Little Billee's landlady, who was much put out at first at having such a novel and unexpected charge imposed on her. It was all explained to her that it must be so. That Madame Svengali, the greatest singer in Europe and an old friend of her tenant's, had suddenly gone out of her mind from grief at the tragic death of her husband, and that for this night at least the unhappy lady must sleep under that roof—indeed, in Little Billee's own bed, and that he would sleep at a hotel ; and that a nurse would be provided at once—it might be only for that one night ; and that the lady was as quiet as a lamb, and would probably recover her faculties after a night's rest. A doctor was sent for from close by, and soon Trilby appeared, with the Laird, and her appearance and her magnificent sables impressed Mrs. Godwin, the landlady—brought her figuratively on her knees. Then Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee departed again and dispersed—to procure a nurse for the night, to find Gecko, to fetch some of Trilby's belongings from the Hôtel de Normandie, and her maid.

The maid (the old German Jewess and Svengali's relative), distracted by the news of her master's death, had gone to the theatre. Gecko was in the hands of the police. Things had got to a terrible pass. But our three friends did their best, and were up most of the night.

So much for La Svengali's *début* in London.

The present scribe was not present on that memorable occasion, and has written this inadequate and most incomplete description partly from hearsay and private information, partly from the reports in the newspapers.

Should any surviving eye-witnesses of that lamentable fiasco read these pages and see any gross inaccuracy in this bald account of it, the P. S. will feel deeply obliged to the same for any corrections or additions, and these will be duly acted upon and gratefully acknowledged in all subsequent editions ; which will be numerous, no doubt, on account of the great interest still felt in " La Svengali," even by those who never saw or heard her (and they are many), and also because the present scribe is better qualified (by his opportunities) for the compiling of this brief biographical sketch than any person now living, with the exception, of course, of " Taffy " and " the Laird," to whose kindness, even more than to his own personal recollections, he owes whatever it may contain of serious historical value.

## ¶

NEXT morning they all three went to Fitzroy Square. Little Billee had slept at Taffy's rooms in Jermyn Street.

Trilby seemed quite pathetically glad to see them again. She was dressed simply and plainly—in black her trunks had been sent from the hotel.

The hospital nurse was with her ; the doctor had just left. He had said that she was suffering from some great nervous shock—a pretty safe diagnosis !

Her wits had apparently not come back, and she seemed in no way to realise her position.

' Ah, what it is to see you again, all three ! It makes one feel glad to be alive ! I've thought of many things, but never of this—never ! Three nice clean Englishmen, all speaking English—and *such* dear old friends ! Ah ! j'aime tant ça—c'est le ciel ! I wonder I've got a word of English left ! "

Her voice was so soft and sweet and low that these ingenuous remarks sounded like a beautiful song. And she made the soft eyes " at them all three, one after another, in her old way and the soft eyes quickly filled with tears.

She seemed ill and weak and worn out, and insisted on keeping the Laird's hand in hers.

" What's the matter with Svengali ? He must be dead ! "

They all three looked at each other, perplexed.

" Ah, he's dead ! I can see it in your faces. He'd got heart disease. I'm sorry, oh, very sorry indeed ! He was always very kind, poor Svengali ! "

" Yes. He's dead," said Taffy.

" And Gecko—dear little Gecko—is he dead,

(*Continued on page* 148.)

# Happy Motherhood

HEALTHY babies make happy mothers, and healthy babies are those who enjoy the tremendous advantages of maternal feeding.

Maternal milk is germ-free, of correct composition and no substitute is equal to it for safeguarding the little ones against nutritional diseases, such as rickets, and building a sure foundation for future health.

During the weeks before baby arrives every mother should take delicious "Ovaltine," and thus ensure an ample supply of rich milk during the nursing period.

Well-meaning friends give varied advice, but it is unwise to experiment with unproved preparations. The nurse knows and the doctor will confirm that the exceptional qualities of "Ovaltine" are of the greatest value to every expectant and nursing mother. It not only promotes an adequate milk secretion, but it maintains the mother's strength, and ensures a quick return to normal health after the confinement.

"Ovaltine" is pure concentrated nourishment, prepared from ripe barley malt, creamy milk and eggs. The essential food elements and vitamins are present in correct nutritive ratio and in an easily digested form. One cup of this delicious food beverage supplies more nourishment than 3 eggs or 12 cupfuls of beef tea.

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P.435

too? I saw him last night—he warmed my hands and feet. Where were we?"

"No, Gecko's not dead. But he's had to be locked up for a little while. He struck Svengali, you know. You saw it all."

"I? No. I never saw it. But I *dreamt* something like it! Gecko with a knife, and people holding him, and Svengali bleeding on the ground. That was just before Svengali's illness. He'd cut himself in the neck, you know—with a rusty nail, he told me. I wonder how? . . . But it was wrong of Gecko to strike him. They were such friends. Why did he?"

"Well—it was because Svengali struck you with his conductor's wand when you were rehearsing. Struck you on the fingers and made you cry! Don't you remember?"

"Struck *me*! *Rehearsing?*—made me *cry!* What *are* you talking about, dear Taffy? Svengali never *struck* me! He was kindness itself—always! And what should *I* rehearse?"

"Well, the songs you were to sing at the theatre in the evening."

"Sing at the theatre! *I* never sang at any theatre—except last night, if that big place was a theatre, and they didn't seem to like it! I'll take precious good care never to sing in a theatre again! How they howled! And there was Svengali in the box opposite, laughing at me. Why was I taken there? And why did that funny little Frenchman in the white waistcoat ask me to sing? I know very well I can't sing well enough to sing in a place like that. What a fool I was! It all seems like a bad dream. What was it all about? *Was* it a dream, I wonder!"

"Well—but don't you remember singing at Paris, in the Salle des Bashibazoucks—and at Vienna—St. Petersburg—lots of places?"

"What nonsense, dear—you're thinking of someone else! *I* never sang anywhere! I've been to Vienna and St. Petersburg—but I never *sang* there. Good heavens!"

Then there was a pause, and our three friends looked at her helplessly.

Little Billee said: "Tell me, Trilby—what made you cut me dead when I bowed to you in the Place de la Concorde, and you were riding with Svengali in that swell carriage?"

"*I* never rode in a swell carriage with Svengali. Omnibuses were more in *our* line! You're dreaming, dear Little Billee—you're taking me for somebody else; and as for my cutting *you*—why, I'd sooner cut myself—into little pieces!"

"*Where* were you staying with Svengali in Paris?"

"I really forget. *Were* we in Paris? Oh, yes, of course. Hôtel Bertrand, Place Notre Dame des Victoires."

"How long have you been going about with Svengali?"

"Oh, months, years—I forget. I was very ill. He cured me."

"Ill! What was the matter?"

"Oh, I was mad with grief, and pain in my eyes, and wanted to kill myself when I lost my dear little Jeannot at Vibraye. I fancied I hadn't been careful enough with him. I was crazed! Don't you remember writing to me there, Taffy—through Angèle Boisse? Such a sweet letter you wrote. I know it by heart! And you, too, Sandy"; and she kissed him. "I wonder where they are, your letters? I've got nothing of my own in the world—not even your dear letters—nor Little Billee's."

"Well, Svengali used to write to me, too, and then he got my address from Angèle. . . .

"When Jeannot died I felt I must kill myself or get away from Vibraye—get away from the people there; so when he was buried I cut my hair short and got a workman's cap and blouse and trousers and walked all the way to Paris without saying anything to anybody. I didn't want anybody to know; I wanted to escape from Svengali, who wrote that he was coming there to fetch me. I wanted to hide in Paris. When I got there at last it was two o'clock in the morning, and I was in dreadful pain, and I'd lost all my money—thirty francs—through a hole in my trousers pocket. Besides, I had a row with a carter in the Halle. He thought I was a man, and hit me and gave me a black eye, just because I patted his horse and fed it with a carrot I'd been trying to eat myself. He was tipsy, I think. Well, I looked over the bridge at the river—just by the Morgue—and wanted to jump in. But the Morgue sickened me, so I hadn't the pluck. Svengali used to be always talking about the Morgue, and my going there some day. He used to say he'd come and look at me there, and the idea made me so sick I couldn't. I got bewildered and quite stupid.

"Then I went to Angèle's, in the Rue des Cloîtres Ste. Pétronille, and waited about, but I hadn't the courage to ring, so I went to the Place St. Anatole des Arts, and looked up at the old studio window, and thought how comfortable it was in there, with the big settee near the stove, and all that, and felt inclined to ring up Madame Vinard and then I remembered Little Billee was ill there, and his mother and sister were with him. Angèle had written me, you know. Poor Little Billee! There he was, very ill!

"So I walked about the place, and up and down the Rue des Trois Mauvais Ladres. Then I went down the Rue de Seine to the river again, and again I hadn't the pluck to jump in. Besides, there was a *sergent-de-ville* who followed and watched me. And the fun of it was that I knew him quite well, and he didn't know me a bit. It was Célestin Beaumollet, who got so tipsy on Christmas night. Don't you remember? The tall one, who was pitted with the smallpox.

"Then I walked about till near daylight. Then I could stand it no longer, and went to

(*Continued on page 150*)

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(Argosy.)

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(Argosy.)

Svengali's, in the Rue Tireliard, but he'd moved to the Rue des Saints Pères; and I went there and found him. I didn't want to a bit, but I couldn't help myself. It was fate, I suppose! He was very kind, and cured me almost directly, and got me coffee and bread and butter—the best I ever tasted—and a warm bath from Bidet Frères, in the Rue Savonarole. It was heavenly! And I slept for two days and two nights! And then he told me how fond he was of me, and how he would always cure me and take care of me and marry me if I would go away with him. He said he would devote his whole life to me, and took a small room for me, next to his.

"I stayed with him there a week, never going out or seeing anyone, mostly asleep. I'd caught a chill.

"He played in two concerts and made a lot of money; and then we went away to Germany together; and no one was a bit the wiser."

"And *did* he marry you?"

"Well—no. He couldn't, poor fellow! He'd already got a wife living, and three children, which he declared were not his. They live in Elberfeld, in Prussia; she keeps a small sweet-stuff shop there. He behaved very badly to them. But it was not through me. He'd deserted them long before; but he used to send them plenty of money when he'd got any; I made him, for I was very sorry for her. He was always talking about her, and what she said and what she did, and imitating her saying her prayers and eating pickled cucumber with one hand and drinking schnapps with the other, so as not to lose any time; till he made me die of laughing. He could be very funny, Svengali, poor dear! And then Gecko joined us, and Marta."

"Who's Marta?"

"His aunt. She cooked for us, and all that. She's coming here presently; she sent word from the hotel; she's very fond of him. Poor Marta! Poor Gecko! What *will* they ever do without Svengali?"

"Then what did he do to live?"

"Oh, he played at concerts, I suppose—and all that."

"Did you ever hear him?"

"Yes. Sometimes Marta took me; at the beginning, you know. He was always very much applauded. He plays beautifully. Everybody said so."

"Did he never try and teach you to sing?'

"Oh, maïe aïe, not he! Why, he always laughed when I tried to sing; and so did Marta; and so did Gecko! It made them roar! I used to sing 'Ben Bolt.' They used to make me, just for fun—and go into fits. *I* didn't mind a scrap. I'd had no training, you know."

"Was there anybody else he knew—any other woman?"

"Not that *I* know of! He always made out he was so fond of me that he couldn't even *look* at another woman. Poor Svengali!" (Here her eyes filled with tears again.) "He was always very kind! But I never could be fond of him in the way he wished—never! It made me sick even to think of! Once I used to hate him—in Paris—in the studio; don't you remember?

"He hardly ever left me; and then Marta looked after me—for I've always been weak and ill, and often so languid that I could hardly walk across the room. It was that three days' walk from Vibraye to Paris. I never got over it.

"I used to try and do all I could—be a daughter to him, as I couldn't be anything else—mend his things, and all that, and cook him little French dishes. I fancy he was very poor at one time; we were always moving from place to place. But I always had the best of everything. He insisted on that—even if he had to go without himself. It made him quite unhappy when I wouldn't eat, so I used to force myself.

"Then, as soon as I felt uneasy about things, or had any pain, he would say, 'Dors, ma mignonne!' and I would sleep at once—for hours, I think—and wake up oh, so tired, and find him kneeling by me, always so anxious and kind—and Marta and Gecko, and sometimes we had the doctor, and I was ill in bed.

"Gecko used to dine and breakfast with us—you've no idea what an angel he is, poor little Gecko! But what a dreadful thing to strike Svengali! *Why* did he? Svengali taught him all he knows!"

"And you knew no one else—no other woman?"

"No one that I can remember—except Marta—not a soul!"

"And that beautiful dress you had on last night?"

"It isn't mine. It's on the bed upstairs, and so's the fur cloak. They belong to Marta. She's got lots of them, lovely things—silk, satin, velvet—and lots of beautiful jewels. Marta deals in them, and makes lots of money.

"I've often tried them on; I'm very easy to fit," she said, "being so tall and thin. And poor Svengali would kneel down and cry, and kiss my hands and feet, and tell me I was his goddess and empress, and all that, which I hate. And Marta used to cry, too. And then he would say:

"'Et maintenant dors, ma mignonne!'

"And when I woke up I was so tired that I went to sleep again on my own account.

"But he was very patient. Oh, dear me! I've always been a poor, helpless, useless log and burden to him!

"Once I actually walked in my sleep—and woke up in the market-place at Prague—and found an immense crowd, and poor Svengali bleeding from the forehead, in a faint on the ground. He'd been knocked down by a horse and cart, he told me. He'd got his guitar with

(*Continued on page* 152)

# corns

## Under feet–quite gone

**Why experiment any longer with dangerous, painful remedies, that cannot reach the pointed root of a corn, the very part that causes all the agony!**

Here is a sufferer who, after two years of useless trials, used Radox Bath Salts. Read the letter :—

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*I had some nasty corns under the flat part of my feet, and after two Radox footbaths I got them right out and have never been troubled with them again. I tried previous remedies which were no good to me. I have suffered terrible pain with my feet the last two years, and using your Radox Bath Salts is the only way I get relief for my aching feet.*

1*st June*, 1927. *J. L. BRADSHAW.*

When you put your feet into a foot-bath containing Radox, the salts soften the hard outer layers of the corn, and the oxygen which Radox liberates enters the pores and penetrates right to the root of the corn, which is thus loosened so that it may be lifted out bodily. Ask for Radox at your Chemists. Price 1/6 per ½lb. Pink Packet, 2/6 double quantity.

**1/6** *Half Pound Pink Packet*

**Radox Bath Salts**

***Give your feet that "Kruschen Feeling."***

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BETTER THAN ALL YOUR HEAVY COATS

5 MINUTES BOILING

# PLASMON OATS

*"THE PREMIER OAT FOOD"*

*Medical Times*

9D. PKT.

ARE STOMACHS LINED WITH PLASMON OATS

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## WHY BE TOO FAT?

**REGAIN YOUR HEALTH AND BEAUTY**

and reduce your weight quickly by commencing the never-failing Antipon Treatment NOW. It has 24 years reputation, and is the only safe, sure and pleasant remedy for over-stoutness. No change of diet, but a reduction of 8 oz. to 3 lb. in a single day and night.

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*Antipon*

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# FRY'S CARTETS

## CUBE BLOCK CHOCOLATE

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*Ask for a Cartet!*

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**FRUIT & NUT CHOCOLATE** (*Maroon Cartet*)
Delicious plain chocolate; mixed with juicy raisins and crisp almonds!

**BELGRAVE CHOCOLATE** (*Red Cartet*)
Perfectly plain, plainly perfect—a chocolate out of the ordinary.

**VALENCIA CHOCOLATE** (*Orange Cartet*)
Milk chocolate made even more delightful with fruity raisins and choicest almonds!

**MILK CHOCOLATE** (*Blue Cartet*)
Made with fresh milk from English farms.

**6D EACH**

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him. I suppose he and Gecko had been playing somewhere, for Gecko had his fiddle. If Gecko hadn't been there I don't know what we should have done. You never saw such queer people as they were—such crowds—you'd think they'd never seen an Englishwoman before. The noise they made and the things they gave me . . . some of them went down on their knees and kissed my hands and the skirts of my gown.

"He was ill in bed for a week after that, and I nursed him, and he was very grateful. Poor Svengali! God knows *I* felt grateful to *him* for many things! Tell me how he died! I hope he hadn't much pain."

They told her it was quite sudden, from heart disease.

"Ah, I knew he had that; he wasn't a healthy man; he used to smoke too much. Marta used always to be very anxious."

Just then Marta came in.

Marta was a fat, elderly Jewess of rather a grotesque type. She seemed overcome with grief—all but prostrate.

Trilby hugged and kissed her, and took off her bonnet and shawl, and made her sit down in a big armchair, and got her a foot-stool.

She couldn't speak a word of anything but Polish and a little German. Trilby had also picked up a little German, and with this and by means of signs, and no doubt through a long intimacy with each other's ways, they understood each other very well. She seemed a very good old creature, and very fond of Trilby, but in mortal terror of the three Englishmen.

Lunch was brought up for the two women and the nurse, and our friends left them, promising to come again that day.

They were utterly bewildered; and the Laird would have it that there was another Madame Svengali somewhere, the real one, and that Trilby was a fraud—self-deceived and self-deceiving—quite unconsciously so, of course.

Truth looked out of her eyes, as it always had done—truth was in every line of her face.

The truth only—nothing but the truth could ever be told in that "voice of velvet," which rang as true when she spoke as that of any thrush or nightingale.

Though she might never sing another note, her mere speech would always be more golden than any silence, whatever she might say.

Except on the one particular point of her singing, she had seemed absolutely sane—so, at least, thought Taffy, the Laird and Little Billee. And each thought to himself, besides, that this last incarnation of Trilbyness was quite the sweetest, most touching, most endearing of all.

They had not failed to note how rapidly she had aged, now that they had seen her without her rouge and pearl-powder; she looked thirty at least—she was only twenty-three.

Her hands were almost transparent in their waxen whiteness; delicate little frosty wrinkles had gathered round her eyes; there were grey streaks in her hair, all strength and straightness and elasticity seemed to have gone out of her with the memory of her endless triumphs (if she really *was* La Svengali), and of her many wanderings from city to city all over Europe.

It was evident enough that the sudden stroke which had destroyed her power of singing had left her physically a wreck.

But she was one of those rarely-gifted beings who cannot look or speak or even stir without waking up (and satisfying) some vague longing that lies dormant in the hearts of most of us, men and women alike; grace, charm, magnetism—whatever the nameless seduction should be called that she possessed to such an unusual degree—she had lost none of it when she lost her high spirits, her health and energy, her wits!

All this was keenly felt by all three—each in his different way—by Taffy and Little Billee especially.

All her past life was forgiven—her sins of omission and commission! And whatever might be her fate—recovery, madness, disease or death—the care of her till she died or recovered should be the principal business of their lives.

Both had loved her. All three, perhaps. One had been loved by her as passionately, as purely, as unselfishly as any man could wish to be loved, and in some extraordinary manner had recovered, after many years, at the mere sudden sight and sound of her, his lost share in our common inheritance—the power to love, and all its joy and sorrow; without which he had found life not worth living, though he had possessed every other gift and blessing in such abundance.

"Oh, Circe, poor Circe, dear Circe, divine enchantress that you were!" he said to himself, in his excitable way. "A mere look from your eyes, a mere note of your heavenly voice, has turned a poor, miserable, callous brute back into a man again, and I will never forget it—never! And now that a still worse trouble than mine has befallen you, you shall always be first in my thoughts till the end!"

And Taffy felt pretty much the same, though he was not by way of talking to himself so eloquently about things as Little Billee.

As they lunched they read the accounts of the previous evening's events in different papers, three or four of which (including the *Times*) had already got leaders about the famous but unhappy singer who had been so suddenly widowed and struck down in the midst of her glory. All these accounts were more or less correct. In one paper it was mentioned that Madame Svengali was under the roof and care of Mr. William Bagot, the painter, in Fitzroy Square.

The inquest on Svengali was to take place that afternoon, and also Gecko's examination at the Bow Street Police Court, for his assault.

*(To be continued in next month's "Argosy.")*

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# The Coming of Abel Behenna

*Concerning a strange pact and how it was kept*

By BRAM STOKER

THE little Cornish port of Pencastle was bright in the early April, when the sun had seemingly come to stay after a long and bitter winter. Boldly and blackly the rock stood out against a background of shaded blue, where the sky fading into mist met the far horizon. The sea was of true Cornish hue—sapphire, save where it became a deep emerald green in the fathomless depths under the cliffs, where the seal caves opened their grim jaws. On the slopes the grass was parched and brown. The spikes of furze bushes were ashy grey, but the golden yellow of their flowers streamed along the hillside, dipping out in lines as the rocks cropped up, and lessening into patches and dots till finally it died away all together where the sea winds swept round the jutting cliffs and cut short the vegetation as though with ever-working aerial shears. The whole hillside, with its body of brown and flashes of yellow, was just like a colossal yellow-hammer.

The little harbour opened from the sea between towering cliffs, and behind a lonely rock, pierced with many caves and blow-holes through which the sea in storm time sent its thunderous voice, together with a fountain of drifting spume. Hence, it wound westwards in a serpentine course, guarded at its entrance by two little curving piers to left and right. These were roughly built of dark slates placed endways and held together with great beams bound with iron bands. Thence, it flowed up the rocky bed of the stream whose winter torrents had of old cut out its way amongst the hills. This stream was deep at first, with here and there, where it widened, patches of broken rock exposed at low water, full of holes where crabs and lobsters were to be found at the ebb of the tide. From amongst the rocks rose sturdy posts, used for warping in the little coasting vessels which frequented the port. Higher up, the stream still flowed deeply, for the tide ran far inland, but always calmly for all the force of the wildest storm was broken below. Some quarter mile inland the stream was deep at high water, but at low tide there were at each side patches of the same broken rock as lower down, through the chinks of which the sweet water of the natural stream trickled and murmured after the tide had ebbed away. Here, too, rose mooring posts for the fishermen's boats.

At either side of the river was a row of cottages down almost on the level of high tide. They were pretty cottages, strongly and snugly built, with trim narrow gardens in front, full of old-fashioned plants, flowering currants, coloured primroses, wallflower, and stone crop. Over the fronts of many of them climbed clematis and wisteria. The window sides and door posts of all were as white as snow, and the little pathway to each was paved with light coloured stones.

At some of the doors were tiny porches, whilst at others were rustic seats cut from tree trunks or from old barrels; in nearly every case the window ledges were filled with boxes or pots of flowers or foliage plants.

Two men lived in cottages exactly opposite each other across the stream. Two men, both young, both good-looking, both prosperous, and who had been companions and rivals from their boyhood. Abel Behenna was dark with the gypsy darkness which the Phœnician mining wanderers left in their track; Eric Sanson—which the local antiquarian said was a corruption of Sagamanson—was fair, with the ruddy hue which marked the path of the wild Norseman. These two seemed to have singled out each other from the very beginning to work and strive together, to fight for each other and to stand back to back in all endeavours. They had now put the coping-stone on their Temple of Unity by falling in love with the same girl. Sarah Trefusis was certainly the prettiest girl in Pencastle, and there was many a young man who would gladly have tried his fortune with her, but that there were two to contend against, and each of these the strongest and most resolute man in the port—except the other. The average young man thought that this was very hard, and on account of it bore no good will to either of the three principals: whilst the average young woman who had, lest worse should befall, to put up with the grumbling of her sweetheart, and the sense of being only second best which it implied, did not either, be sure, regard Sarah with friendly eye.

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THUS it came, in the course of a year or so, for rustic courtship is a slow process, that the two men and the woman found themselves thrown much together. They were all satisfied, so it did not matter, and Sarah, who was vain and something frivolous took care to have her revenge on both men and women in a quiet way. When a young woman in her "walking out" can only boast one not-quite-satisfied young man, it is no particular pleasure to her to see her escort cast sheep's eyes at a better-looking girl supported by two devoted swains.

At length there came a time which Sarah dreaded, and which she had tried to keep distant—the time when she had to make her choice between the two men. She liked them both, and, indeed, either of them might have satisfied the ideas of even a more exacting girl. But her mind was so constituted that she thought more of what she might lose, than of what she might gain; and whenever she thought she had made up her mind she became instantly assailed with doubts as to the wisdom of her choice. Always the man whom she had presumably lost became endowed afresh with a newer and more bountiful crop of advantages than had ever arisen from the possibility of his acceptance. She promised each man that on her birthday she would give him his answer, and that day, the eleventh of April, had now arrived. The promises had been given singly and confidentially, but each was given to a man who was not likely to forget. Early in the morning she found both men hovering round her door.

Neither had taken the other into his confidence, and each was simply seeking an early opportunity of getting his answer, and advancing his suit if necessary. Damon, as a rule, does not take Pythias with him when making a proposal; and in the heart of each man his own affairs had a claim far above any requirements of friendship. So, throughout the day, they kept seeing each other out. The position was doubtless somewhat embarrassing to Sarah, and though the satisfaction of her vanity that she should be thus adored was very pleasing, yet there were moments when she was annoyed with both men for being so persistent. Her only consolation at such moments was that she saw, through the elaborate smiles of the other girls when in passing they noticed her door thus doubly guarded, the jealousy which filled their hearts. Sarah's mother was a person of commonplace and sordid ideas, and, seeing all along the state of affairs, her one intention, persistently expressed to her daughter in the plainest of words, was to so arrange matters that Sarah should get all that was possible out of both men. With this purpose she had cunningly kept herself as far as possible in the background in the matter of her daughter's wooings, and watched in silence.

At first Sarah had been indignant about her mother's sordid views; but, as usual, her weak nature gave way before persistence, and she had now got to the stage of passive acceptance. She was not surprised when her mother whispered to her in the little yard behind the house:—

'Go up the hillside for a while; I want to talk to these two. They're both red-hot for ye, and now's the time to get things fixed!" Sarah began a feeble remonstrance, but her mother cut her short.

"I tell ye, girl, that my mind is made up! Both these men want ye, and only one can have ye, but before ye choose it'll be so arranged that ye'll have all that both have got! Don't argy, child! Go up the hillside, and when ye come back I'll have it fixed—I see a way quite easy!" So Sarah went up the hill-side through the narrow paths between the golden furze, and Mrs. Trefusis joined the two men in the living-room of the little house.

She opened the attack with the desperate courage which is in all mothers when they think for their children, howsoever mean the thoughts may be.

"Ye two men, ye're both in love with my Sarah!"

Their bashful silence gave consent to the barefaced proposition. She went on.

"Neither of ye has much!" Again they tacitly acquiesced in the soft impeachment.

"I don't know that either of ye could keep a wife!" Though neither said a word their looks and bearing expressed distinct dissent. Mrs. Trefusis went on:

"But if ye'd put what ye both have together ye'd make a comfortable home for one of ye—and Sarah!" She eyed the men keenly, with her cunning eyes half shut, as she spoke; then satisfied from her scrutiny that the idea was accepted she went on quickly, as if to prevent argument:

"The girl likes ye both, and mayhap it's hard for her to choose. Why don't ye toss up for her? First put your money together—ye've each got a bit put by, I know. Let the lucky man take the lot and trade with it a bit, and then come home and marry her. Neither of ye's afraid, I suppose! And neither of ye'll say that he won't do that much for the girl that ye both say ye love!"

Abel broke the silence:

"It don't seem the square thing to toss for the girl! She wouldn't like it herself and it doesn't seem—seem respectful like to her——" Eric interrupted. He was conscious that his chance was not so good as Abel's, in case Sarah should wish to choose between them:

"Are ye afraid of the hazard?"

"Not me!" said Abel boldly. Mrs. Trefusis, seeing that her idea was beginning to work, followed up the advantage.

"It is settled that ye put yer money together to make a home for her, whether ye toss for her or leave it for her to choose?"

"Yes," said Eric quickly, and Abel agreed with equal sturdiness. Mrs. Trefusis' little cunning eyes twinkled. She heard Sarah's step in the yard, and said:

"Well! here she comes, and I leave it to her." And she went out.

During her brief walk on the hillside Sarah had been trying to make up her mind. She was feeling almost angry with both men for being the cause of her difficulty, and as she came into the room said shortly:

"I want to have a word with you both—come to the Flagstaff Rock, where we can be alone." She took her hat and went out of the house up the winding path to the steep rock crowned with a high flagstaff, where once the wreckers' fire basket used to burn. This was the rock which formed the northern jaw of the little harbour. There was only room on the path for two abreast, and it marked the state of things pretty well when, by a sort of implied arrangement, Sarah went first, and the two men followed, walking abreast and keeping step. By this time, each man's heart was boiling with jealousy. When they came to the top of the rock, Sarah stood against the flagstaff, and the two young men stood opposite her. She had chosen her position with knowledge and intention, for there was no room for anyone to stand beside her. They were all silent for a while; then Sarah began to laugh and said:—

"I promised the both of you to give you an answer to-day. I've been thinking and thinking, and thinking, till I began to get angry with you both for plaguing me so; and even now I don't seem any nearer to making up my mind." Eric said suddenly: "Let us toss for it, lass!"

Sarah showed no indignation whatever at the proposition; her mother's eternal suggestion had schooled her to the acceptance of something of the kind, and her weak nature made it easy to her to grasp at any way out of the difficulty. She stood with downcast eyes idly picking at the sleeve of her dress, seeming to have tacitly acquiesced in the proposal. Both men instinctively realising this pulled each a coin from his pocket, spun it in the air, and dropped his other hand over the palm on which it lay. For a few seconds they remained thus, all silent; then Abel, who was the more thoughtful of the men, spoke:

" Sarah ! is this good ? " As he spoke he removed the upper hand from the coin and placed the latter back in his pocket. Sarah was nettled.

" Good or bad, it's good enough for me ! Take it or leave it as you like," she said, to which he replied quickly :

" Nay, lass ! Aught that concerns you is good enow for me. I did but think of you lest you might have pain or disappointment hereafter. If you love Eric better nor me, in God's name say so, and I think I'm man enow to stand aside. Likewise, if I'm the one, don't make us both miserable for life ! " Face to face with a difficulty, Sarah's weak nature proclaimed itself ; she put her hands before her face and began to cry, saying :—

" It was my mother. She keeps telling me ! " The silence which followed was broken by Eric, who said hotly to Abel :

" Let the lass alone, can't you ? If she wants to choose this way, let her. It's good enough for me—and for you, too ! She's said it now, and must abide by it ! " Hereupon Sarah turned upon him in sudden fury, and cried :

" Hold your tongue ! What is it to you, at anyrate ? " and she resumed her crying. Eric was so flabbergasted that he had not a word to say, but stood looking particularly foolish, with his mouth open and his hands held out with the coin still between them. All were silent till Sarah, taking her hands from her face, laughed hysterically and said :

" As you two can't make up your minds, I'm going home ! " and she turned to go.

" Stop," said Abel, in an authoritative voice. " Eric, you hold the coin, and I'll cry. Now, before we settle it, let us clearly understand : the man who wins takes all the money that we both have got, brings it to Bristol and ships on a voyage and trades with it. Then he comes back and marries Sarah, and they two keep all, whatever there may be, as the result of the trading. Is this what we understand ? "

" Yes," said Eric.

" I'll marry him on my next birthday," said Sarah. Having said it the intolerably mercenary spirit of her action seemed to strike her, and impulsively she turned away with a bright blush. Fire seemed to sparkle in the eyes of both the men. Said Eric : " A year so be ! The man that wins is to have one year."

" Toss ! " cried Abel, and the coin spun in the air. Eric caught it, and again held it between his outstretched hands.

" Heads ! " cried Abel, a pallor sweeping over his face as he spoke. As he leaned forward to look Sarah leaned forward too, and their heads almost touched. He could feel her hair blowing on his cheek, and it thrilled through him like fire. Eric lifted his upper hand ; the coin lay with its head up. Abel stepped forward and took Sarah in his arms. With a curse Eric hurled the coin far into the sea. Then he leaned against the flagstaff and scowled at the others with his hands thrust deep in his pockets. Abel whispered wild words of passion and delight into Sarah's ears, and as she listened she began to believe that fortune had rightly interpreted the wishes of her secret heart, and that she loved Abel best.

Presently Abel looked up and caught sight of Eric's face as the last ray of sunset struck it. The red light intensified the natural ruddiness of his complexion, and he looked as though he were steeped in blood. Abel did not mind his scowl, for now that his own heart was at rest he could feel unalloyed pity for his friend. He stepped over, meaning to comfort him, and held out his hand, saying :

" It was my chance, old lad. Don't grudge it to me. I'll try to make Sarah a happy woman, and you shall be a brother to us both ! "

" Brother be damned ! " was all the answer Eric made, as he turned away. When he had gone a few steps down the rocky path he turned and came back. Standing before Abel and Sarah, who had their arms round each other, he said :

" You have a year. Make the most of it ! And be sure you're in time to claim your wife ! Be back to have your banns up in time to be married on the eleventh April. If you're not, I tell you I shall have my banns up, and you may get back too late."

" What do you mean, Eric ? You are mad ! "

" No more mad than you are, Abel Behenna. You go, that's your chance ! I stay, that's mine ! I don't mean to let the grass grow under my feet. Sarah cared no more for you than for me five minutes ago, and she may come back to that five minutes after you're gone ! You won by a point only—the game may change."

" The game won't change ! " said Abel

shortly. "Sarah, you'll be true to me? You won't marry till I return?"

"For a year!" added Eric, quickly, "that's the bargain."

"I promised for the year," said Sarah. A dark look came over Abel's face, and he was about to speak, but he mastered himself and smiled.

"I mustn't be too hard or get angry to-night! Come, Eric! we played and fought together. I won fairly. I played fairly all the game of our wooing! You know that as well as I do; and now when I am going away, I shall look to my old and true comrade to help me when I am gone!"

"I'll help you none," said Eric, "so help me God!"

"It was God helped me," said Abel, simply.

"Then let Him go on helping you," said Eric angrily. "The Devil is good enough for me!" and without another word he rushed down the steep path and disappeared behind the rocks.

When he had gone Abel hoped for some tender passage with Sarah, but the first remark she made chilled him.

"How lonely it all seems without Eric!" and this note sounded till he had left her at home—and after.

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EARLY on the next morning Abel heard a noise at his door, and on going out saw Eric walking rapidly away: a small canvas bag full of gold and silver lay on the threshold; on a small slip of paper pinned to it was written:

*Take the money and go. I stay. God for you! The Devil for me! Remember the eleventh of April.*

ERIC SANSON."

That afternoon Abel went off to Bristol, and a week later sailed on the *Star of the Sea* bound for Pahang. His money—including that which had been Eric's—was on board in the shape of a venture of cheap toys. He had been advised by a shrewd old mariner of Bristol whom he knew, and who knew the ways of the Chersonese, who predicted that every penny invested would be returned with a shilling to boot.

As the year wore on Sarah became more and more disturbed in her mind. Eric was always at hand to make love to her in his own persistent, masterful manner, and to this she did not object. Only one letter came from Abel, to say that his venture had proved successful, and that he had sent some two hundred pounds to the bank at Bristol, and was trading with fifty pounds still remaining in goods for China, whither the *Star of the Sea* was bound and whence she would return to Bristol. He suggested that Eric's share of the venture should be returned to him with his share of the profits. This proposition was treated with anger by Eric, and as simply childish by Sarah's mother.

More than six months had since then elapsed, but no other letter had come, and Eric's hopes which had been dashed down by the letter from Pahang, began to rise again. He perpetually assailed Sarah with an "if!" If Abel did not return, would she then marry him? If the eleventh April went by without Abel being in the port, would she give him over? If Abel had taken his fortune, and married another girl on the head of it would she marry him, Eric, as soon as the truth were known? And so on in an endless variety of possibilities. The power of the strong will and the determined purpose over the woman's weaker nature became in time manifest. Sarah began to lose her faith in Abel and to regard Eric as a possible husband; and a possible husband is in a woman's eye different to all other men. A new affection for him began to arise in her breast, and the daily familiarities of permitted courtship furthered the growing affection. Sarah began to regard Abel as rather a rock in the road of her life, and had it not been for her mother's constantly reminding her of the good fortune already laid by in the Bristol Bank she would have tried to have shut her eyes altogether to the fact of Abel's existence.

The eleventh of April was Saturday, so that in order to have the marriage on that day it would be necessary that the banns should be called on Sunday, twenty-second of March. From the beginning of that month Eric kept perpetually on the subject of Abel's absence, and his outspoken opinion that the latter was either dead or married began to become a reality to the woman's mind. As the first half of the month wore on Eric became more jubilant, and after church on the fifteenth he took Sarah for a walk to the Flagstaff Rock. There he asserted himself strongly:

"I told Abel, and you too, that if he was not here to put up his banns in time for

the eleventh, I would put up mine for the twelfth. Now the time has come when I mean to do it. He hasn't kept his word."

Here Sarah struck in out of her weakness and indecision :

" He hasn't broken it yet ! " Eric ground his teeth with anger.

" If you mean to stick up for him," he said, as he smote his hands savagely on the flagstaff, which sent forth a shivering murmur, " well and good. I'll keep my part of the bargain. On Sunday I shall give notice of the banns, and you can deny them in the church if you will. If Abel is in Pencastle on the eleventh, he can have them cancelled, and his own put up ; but till then, I take my course, and woe to anyone who stands in my way ! " With that he flung himself down the rocky pathway, and Sarah could not but admire his Viking strength and spirit, as, crossing the hill, he strode away along the cliffs towards Bude.

During the week no news was heard of Abel, and on Saturday Eric gave notice of the banns of marriage between himself and Sarah Trefusis. The clergyman would have remonstrated with him, for although nothing formal had been told to the neighbours, it had been understood since Abel's departure that on his return he was to marry Sarah ; but Eric would not discuss the question.

" It is a painful subject, sir," he said with a firmness which the parson, who was a very young man, could not but be swayed by. " Surely there is nothing against Sarah and me. Why should there be any bones made about the matter ? " The parson said no more, and on the next day he read out the banns for the first time amidst an audible buzz from the congregation. Sarah was present, contrary to custom, and though she blushed furiously enjoyed her triumph over the other girls whose banns had not yet come. Before the week was over she began to make her wedding dress. Eric used to come and look at her at work and the sight thrilled through him. He used to say all sorts of pretty things to her at such times, and there were to both delicious moments of love-making.

The banns were read a second time on the twenty-ninth, and Eric's hope grew more and more fixed, though there were to him moments of acute despair when he realised that the cup of happiness might be dashed from his lips at any moment, right up to the last. At such time he was full of passion—desperate and remorseless —and he ground his teeth and clenched his hands in a wild way as though some taint of the old Berserker fury of his ancestors still lingered in his blood. On the Thursday of that week he looked in on Sarah and found her, amid a flood of sunshine, putting finishing touches to her white wedding gown. His own heart was full of gaiety, and the sight of the woman who was so soon to be his own so occupied, filled him with a joy unspeakable, and he felt faint with a languorous ecstasy. Bending over he kissed Sarah on the mouth, and then whispered in her rosy ear :—

" Your wedding dress, Sarah ! And for me ! " As he drew back to admire her she looked up saucily, and said to him :—

" Perhaps not for you. There is more than a week yet for Abel ! " and then cried out in dismay, for with a wild gesture and a fierce oath Eric dashed out of the house, banging the door behind him. The incident disturbed Sarah more than she could have thought possible, for it awoke all her fears and doubts and indecision afresh. She cried a little, and put by her dress, and to soothe herself went out to sit for a while on the summit of the Flagstaff Rock. When she arrived she found there a little group anxiously discussing the weather. The sea was calm and the sun bright, but across the sea were strange lines of darkness and light, and close in to shore the rocks were fringed with foam, which spread out in great white curves and circles as the currents drifted. The wind had backed, and came in sharp, cold puffs. The blowhole, which ran under the Flagstaff Rock, from the rocky bay without to the harbour within, was booming at intervals, and the seagulls were screaming ceaselessly as they wheeled about the entrance of the port.

" It looks bad," she heard an old fisherman say to the coastguard. " I seen it just like this once before, when the East Indiaman *Coromandel* went to pieces in Dizzard Bay ! " Sarah did not wait to hear more. She was of a timid nature where danger was concerned, and could not bear to hear of wrecks and disasters. She went home and resumed the completion of her dress, secretly determined to appease Eric when she should meet him with a sweet apology—and to take the earliest opportunity of being even with him after her marriage.

The old fisherman's weather prophecy was justified. That night at dusk a wild storm came on. The sea rose and lashed the western coasts from Sky to Scilly and left a tale of disaster everywhere. The sailors and fishermen of Pencastle all turned out on the rocks and cliffs and watched eagerly. Presently, by a flash of lightning, a " ketch " was seen drifting under only a jib about half-a-mile outside the port. All eyes and all glasses were concentrated on her, waiting for the next flash, and when it came a chorus went up that it was the *Lovely Alice*, trading between Bristol and Penzance, and touching at all the little ports between. " God help them ! " said the harbour-master, " for nothing in this world can save them when they are between Bude and Tintagel and the wind on shore ! " The coastguards exerted themselves, and, aided by brave hearts and willing hands, they brought the rocket apparatus up on the summit of the Flagstaff Rock. Then they burned blue lights so that those on board might see the harbour opening in case they could make any effort to reach it. They worked gallantly enough on board ; but no skill or strength of man could avail. Before many minutes were over the *Lovely Alice* rushed to her doom on the great island rock that guarded the mouth of the port.

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THE screams of those on board were fairly borne on the tempest as they flung themselves into the sea in a last chance for life. The blue lights were kept burning, and eager eyes peered into the depths of the waters in case any face could be seen ; and ropes were held ready to fling out in aid. But never a face was seen, and the willing arms rested idle. Eric was there amongst his fellows. His old Icelandic origin was never more apparent than in that wild hour. He took a rope, and shouted in the ear of the harbour-master :

" I shall go down on the rock over the seal cave. The tide is running up, and someone may drift in there ! "

" Keep back, man ! " came the answer. " Are you mad ? One slip on that rock and you are lost : and no man could keep his feet in the dark on such a place in such a tempest ! "

" Not a bit," came the reply. " You remember how Abel Behenna saved me there on a night like this when my boat went on the Gull Rock. He dragged me up from the deep water in the seal cave, and now someone may drift in there again as I did," and he was gone into the darkness.

The projecting rock hid the light on the Flagstaff Rock, but he knew his way too well to miss it. His boldness and sureness of foot standing to him, he shortly stood on the great round-topped rock cut away beneath by the action of the waves over the entrance of the seal cave, where the water was fathomless. There he stood in comparative safety, for the concave shape of the rock beat back the waves with their own force, and though the water below him seemed to boil like a seething cauldron, just beyond the spot there was a space of almost calm. The rock, too, seemed here to shut off the sound of the gale, and he listened as well as watched. As he stood there ready, with his coil of rope poised to throw, he thought he heard below him, just beyond the whirl of the water, a faint despairing cry. He echoed it with a shout that rang out into the night. Then he waited for the flash of lightning, and as it passed flung his rope out into the darkness where he had seen a face rising through the swirl of the foam. The rope was caught, for he felt a pull on it, and he shouted again in his mighty voice :

" Tie it round your waist, and I shall pull you up." Then when he felt that it was fast he moved along the rock to the far side of the sea cave, where the deep water was something stiller, and where he could get foothold secure enough to drag the rescued man on the overhanging rock. He began to pull, and shortly he knew from the rope taken in that the man he was now rescuing must soon be close to the top of the rock. He steadied himself for a moment, and drew a long breath, that he might at the next effort complete the rescue. He had just bent his back to the work when a flash of lightning revealed to each other the two men—the rescuer and the rescued.

Eric Sanson and Abel Behenna were face to face—and none knew of the meeting save themselves ; and God.

On the instant a wave of passion swept through Eric's heart. All his hopes were shattered, and with the hatred of Cain his eyes looked out. He saw in the instant of recognition the joy in Abel's face that his was the hand to succour him, and this intensified his hate. Whilst the passion was on him he started back, and the rope

ran out between his hands. His moment of hate was followed by an impulse of his better manhood, but it was too late.

Before he could recover himself, Abel encumbered with the rope that should have aided him, was plunged with a despairing cry back into the darkness of the devouring sea.

Then, feeling all the madness and the doom of Cain upon him, Eric rushed back over the rocks, heedless of the danger and eager only for one thing—to be amongst other people whose living noises would shut out that last cry which seemed to ring still in his ears. When he regained the Flagstaff Rock the men surrounded him, and through the fury of the storm he heard the harbour-master say :—

" We feared you were lost when we heard a cry ! How white you are ! Where is your rope ? Was there anyone drifted in ? "

" No one," he shouted in answer, for he felt that he could never explain that he had let his old comrade slip back into the sea, and at the very place and under the very circumstances in which that comrade had saved his own life. He hoped by one bold lie to set the matter at rest for ever. There was no one to bear witness—and if he should have to carry that still white face in his eyes and that despairing cry in his ears for evermore—at least none should know of it. " No one," he cried, more loudly still. " I slipped on the rock, and the rope fell into the sea ! " So saying he left them, and, rushing down the steep path, gained his own cottage and locked himself within.

The remainder of that night he passed lying on his bed—dressed and motionless—staring upwards, and seeming to see through the darkness a pale face gleaming wet in the lightning, with its glad recognition turning to ghastly despair, and to hear a cry which never ceased to echo in his soul.

In the morning the storm was over and all was smiling again, except that the sea was still boisterous with its unspent fury. Great pieces of wreck drifted into the port, and the sea around the island rock was strewn with others. Two bodies also drifted into the harbour—one the master of the wrecked ketch, the other a strange seaman whom no one knew.

Sarah saw nothing of Eric till the evening, and then he only looked in for a minute. He did not come into the house, but simply put his head in through the open window.

" Well, Sarah," he called out in a loud voice, though to her it did not ring truly, " is the wedding dress done ? Sunday week, mind ! Sunday week ! "

Sarah was glad to have the reconciliation so easy ; but, womanlike, when she saw the storm was over and her own fears groundless, she at once repeated the cause of offence.

" Sunday so be it," she said, without looking up, " if Abel isn't there on Saturday ! " Then she looked up saucily, though her heart was full of fear of another outburst on the part of her impetuous lover. But the window was empty ; Eric had taken himself off, and with a pout she resumed her work. She saw Eric no more till Sunday afternoon, after the banns had been called the third time, when he came up to her before all the people with an air of proprietorship which half-pleased and half-annoyed her.

" Not yet, mister ! " she said, pushing him away, as the other girls giggled. " Wait till Sunday next, if you please—the day after Saturday ! " she added, looking at him saucily. The girls giggled again, and the young men guffawed. They thought it was the snub that touched him so that he became as white as a sheet as he turned away. But Sarah, who knew more than they did, laughed, for she saw triumph through the spasm of pain that overspread his face.

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THE week passed uneventfully ; however, as Saturday drew nigh Sarah had occasional moments of anxiety, and as to Eric he went about at night-time like a man possessed. He restrained himself when others were by, but now and again he went down amongst the rocks and caves and shouted aloud. This seemed to relieve him somewhat, and he was better able to restrain himself for some time after. All Saturday he stayed in his own house and never left it. As he was to be married on the morrow the neighbours thought it was shyness on his part and did not trouble or notice him. Only once was he disturbed and that was when the chief boatman came to him and sat down, and after a pause said :

" Eric, I was over in Bristol yesterday. I was in the ropemaker's getting a coil to replace the one you lost the night of the storm, and there I saw Michael Heavens of this place, who is salesman there. He

told me that Abel Behenna had come home the week ere last on the *Star of the Sea* from Canton, and that he had lodged a sight of money in the Bristol Bank in the name of Sarah Behenna. He told Michael so himself—and that he had taken a passage on the *Lovely Alice* to Pencastle. Bear up, man," for Eric had with a groan dropped his head on his knees, with his face between his hands. " He was your old comrade, I know, but you couldn't help him. He must have gone down with the rest that awful night. I thought I'd better tell you, lest it might come some other way, and you might keep Sarah Trefusis from being frightened. They were good friends once, and women take these things to heart. It would not do to let her be pained with such a thing on her wedding-day ! " Then he rose and went away, leaving Eric still sitting disconsolately with his head on his knees.

" Poor fellow ! " murmured the chief boatman to himself ; " he takes it to heart. Well, well ! right enough ! They were true comrades once, and Abel saved him ! "

The afternoon of that day, when the children had left school, they strayed as usual on half-holidays along the quay and the paths by the cliffs. Presently some of them came running in a state of great excitement to the harbour, where a few men were unloading a coal ketch, and a great many were superintending the operation. One of the children called out :

" There is a porpoise in the harbour mouth ! We saw it come through the blow hole ! It had a long tail, and was deep under the water ! "

It was no porpoise," said another ; " it was a seal ; but it had a long tail ! It came out of the seal cave ! " The other children bore various testimony, but on two points they were unanimous—it, whatever " it " was, had come through the blow-hole deep under the water, and had a long, thin tail—a tail so long that they could not see the end of it. There was much unmerciful chaffing of the children by the men on this point, but as it was evident that they had seen something, quite a number of persons, young and old, male and female, went along the high paths on either side of the harbour-mouth to catch a glimpse of this new addition to the fauna of the sea, a long-tailed porpoise or seal. The tide was now coming in. There was a slight breeze, and the surface of the water was rippled so that it was only at moments that anyone could see clearly into the deep water. After a spell of watching a woman called out that she saw something moving up the channel, just below where she was standing. There was a stampede to the spot, but by the time the crowd had gathered the breeze had freshened, and it was impossible to see with any distinctness below the surface of the water. On being questioned the woman described what she had seen, but in such an incoherent way that the whole thing was put down as an affect of imagination ; had it not been for the children's report she would not have been credited at all. Her semi-hysterical statement that what she saw was " like a pig with the entrails out " was only thought anything of by an old coastguard, who shook his head but did not make any remark. For the remainder of the daylight this man was seen always on the bank, looking into the water, but always with disappointment manifest on his face.

Eric arose early on the next morning—he had not slept all night, and it was a relief to him to move about in the light. He shaved himself with a hand that did not tremble, and dressed himself in his wedding clothes. There was a haggard look on his face, and he seemed as though he had grown years older in the last few days. Still there was a wild, uneasy light of triumph in his eyes, and he kept murmuring to himself over and over again :

" This is my wedding-day ! Abel cannot claim her now—living or dead !—living or dead ! Living or dead ! " He sat in his arm-chair, waiting with an uncanny quietness for the church hour to arrive. When the bell began to ring he arose and passed out of his house, closing the door behind him. He looked at the river and saw that the tide had just turned. In the church he sat with Sarah and her mother, holding Sarah's hand tightly in his all the time, as though he feared to lose her. When the service was over they stood up together, and were married in the presence of the entire congregation ; for no one left the church. Both made the responses clearly—Eric's being even on the defiant side. When the wedding was over Sarah took her husband's arm, and they walked away together, the boys and younger girls being cuffed by their elders into a decorous behaviour, for they would fain have followed close behind their heels.

## The Coming of Abel Behenna

The way from the church led down to the back of Eric's cottage, a narrow passage being between it and that of his next neighbour. When the bridal couple had passed through this the remainder of the congregation, who had followed them at a little distance, were startled by a long, shrill scream from the bride. They rushed through the passage and found her on the bank with wild eyes, pointing to the river bed opposite Eric Sanson's door.

The falling tide had deposited there the body of Abel Behenna stark upon the broken rocks. The rope trailing from its waist had been twisted by the current round the mooring post, and had held it back whilst the tide had ebbed away from it. The right elbow had fallen in a chink in the rock, leaving the hand outstretched toward Sarah, with the open palm upward as though it were extended to receive hers, the pale drooping fingers open to the clasp.

All that happened afterwards was never quite known to Sarah Sanson. Whenever she would try to recollect there would come a buzzing in her ears and a dimness in her eyes, and all would pass away. The only thing that she could remember of it at all—and this she never forgot—was Eric's breathing heavily, with his face whiter than that of the dead man, as he muttered under his breath :

" Devil's help ! Devil's faith ! Devil's price ! "

## *Mrs. Bennet on Love*

MRS. BENNET had many grievances to relate, and much to complain of. They had been very ill-used since she last saw her sister. Two of her girls had been on the point of marriage, and after all there was nothing in it.

" I do not blame Jane," she continued, " for Jane would have got Mr. Bingley if she could. But Lizzy ! oh, sister ! it is very hard to think that she might have been Mr. Collins's wife by this time had it not been for her own perverseness. He made her an offer in this very room, and she refused him. The consequence of it is that Lady Lucas will have a daughter married before I have, and that Longbourn estate is just as much entailed as ever. The Lucases are very artful people indeed, sister. They are all for what they can get. I am sorry to say it of them, but so it is. It makes me very nervous and poorly to be thwarted so in my own family, and to have neighbours who think of themselves before anybody else. However, your coming just at this time is the greatest of comforts, and I am very glad to hear what you tell us of long sleeves."

Mrs. Gardiner, to whom the chief of this news had been given before, in the course of Jane and Elizabeth's correspondence with her, made her sister a slight answer, and, in compassion to her nieces, turned the conversation.

When alone with Elizabeth afterwards, she spoke more on the subject. " It seems likely to have been a desirable match for Jane," said she. " I am sorry it went off. But these things happen so often ! A young man, such as you describe Mr. Bingley, so easily falls in love with a pretty girl for a few weeks, and when accident separates them, so easily forgets her, that these sort of inconstancies are very frequent."

" An excellent consolation in its way," said Elizabeth, " but it will not do for us. We do not suffer by accident. It does not often happen that the interference of friends will persuade a young man of independent fortune to think no more of a girl whom he was violently in love with only a few days before."

" But that expression of ' violently in love ' is so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise only from a half-hour's acquaintance as to a real, strong attachment. Pray, how violent was Mr. Bingley's love ? "

" I never saw a more promising inclination ; he was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by her. Every time they met it was more decided and remarkable. At his own ball he offended two or three young ladies by not asking them to dance ; and I spoke to him twice myself without receiving an answer. Could there be finer symptoms ? Is not general incivility the very essence of love ? "

JANE AUSTEN.

# The Song of The River

*"Pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes"*

**By Mrs. BAILLIE REYNOLDS**

HILDEBRAND looked very fine and tall in his uniform. The reigning Duke, as he stood beside him in the deep embrasure of his library window overlooking the rushing Reuss, cut a very poor figure.

Not only was the reigning Duke a little below middle height, not only had he a dull complexion and hair that was beginning to turn grey; he also wore at the moment an expression which one might call hang-dog. He seemed as if he felt himself abased in the eyes of the well-set-up blond giant, who lolled at ease upon the tapestry cushions of the window-seat.

It was fine May weather. Through the open casement the humming of the headlong waters below the window could be easily heard. Maurice Duke of Abendland thought in his heart that the song of his river had been the accompaniment of all the worst moments of his life.

It was to this room that they had summoned him, at the age of twelve, to tell him that his father was dead. The late Duke had been, to put it mildly, not an estimable person · the exact circumstances which led to his premature decease were never openly mentioned. His wife had divorced him in the babyhood of Maurice, and had subsequently married somebody else and forgotten the little boy left to grow up in all the vile influences of his father's ill-regulated Court.

Maurice was by nature a simple and sincere person, but he was without confidence in his own judgment. He matured slowly, and for some years he took his standard of manners and of morals without question from those about him.

Vice did not at any time attract him, and he had always disliked wine. But he had not passed altogether unscathed through the defilement of his surroundings. He would hardly have been human had he done so.

Then came the time when it was suggested to him that the Princess Erica of Sullenheim would be a suitable wife for him.

He remembered how his private secretary showed him her picture in the embrasure of that very window. Followed a period when life became a golden dream of infinite possibilities. And he rode away to Sullenheim and brought back the most wonderful creature that it had been his lot to meet.

It was not the beauty of Erica that chained him — it was her astonishing personality—the quality of her amazing unlikeness to anybody he had ever beheld.

He had hardly, in his life of eight-and-twenty years, spoken to a woman with definite moral standards. His tempestuous Princess, a mass of whims, theories, ideals, was to him something that no mere man could hope to understand; could merely adore and struggle to please, through a mist of mutual misunderstanding which constantly grew thicker and thicker.

The marriage on Erica's part had been purely dynastic. Her descent was of the proudest in Europe, and some English blood on her mother's side gave her, no doubt, her lofty moral outlook. She had held it her duty to marry Maurice of Abendland because it is the duty of every royal princess to exalt the royal line, to hold up an ensign to the people; and, as everybody spoke in a shocked manner of the state of the Court in Abendland, Erica's mission was abundantly clear.

That her crusade could fail was an idea that was slow in presenting itself to her ardent temperament. She assumed that her husband was a person of limited intelligence, but of doglike fidelity, whom she could mould, as she could mould the realm in general, to her alien ideas.

As weeks went by, and the only result of her efforts seemed to be her own steadily increasing unpopularity, she felt within her a consciousness of being baffled, which was as new as it was horrible.

In fact, she was a charming but spoilt child, who believed herself capable of work before which the most competent, the wisest, the most experienced of women

might have shrunk. All her life she had been admired and adored, and the result in her was as fatal, though not as obvious, as in the case of her husband, who all his life had been corrupted and misguided.

She brought with her from her home her old governess, Frau von Leine, who was in all matters her guide, philosopher and friend. This lady was as besottedly fond of Erica as her husband was, but possessed that power to influence her which was in him so utterly lacking. She unwisely encouraged and supported the Princess in her plan of insulting the ladies of the Court and parading her own virtues before a degraded society.

Her presence and her devotion kept the husband and wife entirely apart. The breach between them grew deeper and wider. Maurice began to despair of ever reaching through to any sort of understanding with his wife across her *chevaux-de-frise* of notions and regulations and dislikes.

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AND then, five or six months after the marriage, a story filtered its way to Frau von Leine. She hesitated to let it reach the ears of her princess. But it persisted. She heard it again from another source. Still she refrained; until one day, after a regrettable scene at a Court reception—a scene which showed how completely out of touch with her people was the new Duchess—there came, in the privacy of Erica's apartments, a burst of bitter, wild misery and rebellion. She wished she had never seen the horrible Duchy of Abendland or its stupid Duke. She had tried to do good and had failed. She was broken-hearted. And she was fettered for life to a people that hated and a husband that did not understand her.

The outburst culminated in a low fever, and the Princess grew so weak that Frau von Leine dare no longer withhold from her the news that she thought there was little doubt the Princess could free herself from her marriage if she would.

The story, as told, pricked Erica in her tenderest spot—her pride. That a man with such a wife as herself—. She exploded in tempests of indignation. She sent for her father and poured out to him the version she had heard of her husband's conduct; and her father, when he saw her weak state and her broken spirit, was aroused to deep and steady indignation.

He craved an interview with Maurice, and it took place in this very room, in this window embrasure. The Duke seemed startled at first. One might almost have used the expression thunderstruck. He sat very silently while his wife's father rated him. Even after the storm of words ceased to batter him, he maintained the same rigid attitude, as if the accusation had deprived him of the powers of his mind. But, after a while, after he had gazed half-seeing at the foaming, grey-green water that swirled beneath the wall, he said quietly that if the Princess wished to recover her liberty he should not offer any opposition.

The Prince of Sullenheim had stared helplessly at him as at a lunatic when this unexpected statement crossed his pale lips.

"Then I am to understand that you do not deny this story?" he had furiously demanded; and Maurice answered:

"No; I do not deny it."

Ah, well! That was a year ago now. History repeats itself. The Duke's mother had divorced his father, and left her son to other hands. Now the Duke's wife had divorced him, and the succession in the direct line was seriously threatened.

Hildebrand, the Duke's distant cousin, was the next heir. He had come to-day to ascertain, if he could, whether the reigning Duke had any intention of re-marriage.

Maurice said plainly enough that he had none. He had grown very silent and stony since his wife left him. His hair had begun to whiten and his complexion had faded. His curious clear blue eyes, his one good feature, had lost their glint. He was difficult of access. And the big Hildebrand, deep down in his heart, was afraid of his cousin.

But at last he had managed to bring out the nature of his errand, which was neither more nor less than that he wished for the ducal permission to marry the Princess Erica himself.

Maurice had taken the news without visible emotion. He stood by the table moving a pen idly up and down among the lines of the pattern of the tablecloth. His eyes followed the pen's motions with absorbed gravity.

"You have, I conclude, said nothing definite to her Highness on the subject?" he asked.

"No; I have played you quite fair," said Hildebrand. "But I have seen a good deal of her lately, and I—I think I may say

without conceit that I believe I have a good chance. You cannot expect a pretty woman like that to live alone all her life."

"Is she pretty?" asked Maurice absently, as if he were unconscious that he spoke aloud.

"Is Erica pretty? Are you blind?" asked Hildebrand, with a scornful laugh.

"It is not the word I should use," said Maurice, his voice taking on an added stiffness because of his inward rage at the use of Erica's name by Hildebrand. 'But there is another thing I must ask. You know—her Highness divorced me. What about your own record?" His lips curled. "It is, to put it moderately, no better than my own."

Hildebrand laughed lightly. "My good sir," he said, "you don't suppose that kind of thing matters if she is fond of you?"

"Quite so," agreed the Duke hastily. Silence fell. The river sang on boisterously. Maurice thought, not for the first time, of the relief of leaping down into the wild, hurrying flood, and being borne immeasurably far, out of the turmoil of life and the difficulty of understanding women. "Well," he said at length, "if her Highness is willing, I shall offer no objection, Hildebrand. But on this point—the point of her willingness—I shall take nobody's opinion. I shall use my own method of finding out. I will not again risk her happiness in an uncongenial marriage. Therefore, please do not move further in the matter until you hear from me."

It was fully as much as—nay, more than Hildebrand had expected. He uttered his thanks volubly, and gave his promise freely. "No more feeling than a fish, that Maurice," he reflected. "No wonder she could not stand it, poor little darling."

And he clanked off, with a song on his lips, leaving his cousin alone with the river and his thoughts.

Maurice sat down at his writing-table, hiding his face in his hands. He remained so for fully a quarter of an hour before stretching out his hand to his telephone and summoning his confidential secretary.

"Kreuzthal," he said, "you and I are going a journey incognito. The incognito is to be extremely strict. We are going to travel straight through to Bolewitz, and to pass the night at the Goldner Löwe, travelling as persons without title. I desire that nobody outside the palace be informed of my absence. I shall probably return the day after to-morrow. The Press is not to know anything of my movements. You had better see the editors of the two dailies."

Bolewitz is, as everybody knows, a very fashionable place in the season. It stands in Sullenheim, just on the confines of Abendland. The great Burg, once an important stronghold, towers above the town on a spur of the grand mountain range. A new portion was built about a century since to turn the frowning fortress into a royal residence for the Crown Prince of Sullenheim; but, as the present Crown Prince was not, as yet, married, he was glad to have his sister Erica there with him. They kept the place very gay, for there was splendid shooting and hunting in the mountains, and most of the crowned heads of Europe came at some time or other for the Bolewitz cure. Everybody said that the Princess Erica had quite recovered her health and spirits. She was foremost in all the amusements of the Court and untiring in her philanthropies among a population who appreciated her efforts at something more than their true value.

On the morning following the day upon which Hildebrand went to Reussberg to obtain his cousin's sanction to his suit, a certain Serene Highness, who had been staying at Burg Bolewitz and taking the cure, was departing with regret from the gay, exhilarating air and society of the charming place.

The royal party drove down in open carriages from the castle to the railway station, and, as they passed through the park, the amount of carriage traffic and the enthusiasm of the spectators obliged them to go at a footpace, so that a young man, who stood among the crowd unnoticed, had an excellent chance of observing the looks and expression of the ex-Duchess. She was radiant. Her cheeks were glowing with health, her manner to her guest was full of dignity, yet natural and charming. Her eyes were as lovely, the turn of her little head more enchanting than ever.

When the *cortége* had passed, the strange young man remained in the park, seated quietly in the shade of the young trees just bursting into leaf. He waited there until the carriage containing the Princess and Frau von Leine passed again upon its homeward way.

This time her Highness was not exerting herself. She sat upright, and the line of her

closed lips was wistful. Her eyes wore a far-away look, which told Maurice, who in some occult way could divine her thoughts that something lay under the surface of her gaiety.

The conviction that Hildebrand had touched the heart which he could not reach bored its way into Maurice's consciousness like a red-hot pin driven in.

His opinion of himself was not high; but he knew himself for a better man than his cousin and heir.

However, in Maurice's universe there was only one thing actually needful, namely, that Erica should be happy. His own attempt to make her so, by giving her power and position, and all the love his heart had ever had to give, had proved a signal failure. This failure must be retrieved. He had done what he could by releasing her from himself. He had felt sure she would marry again. But that it should be Hildebrand, of all men, pierced him through and through.

He rose presently, returned to his hotel, and partook of *déjeuner* with Kreuzthal. After that he smoked a little, sat very still, as was his frequent wont of late, and perused certain documents of State, copies of which he had brought with him.

Kreuzthal had discreetly made, on his behalf, minute inquiries as to what the Princess would be doing that afternoon, and when she would be doing it; and about half an hour before she was expected back from her afternoon ride the Duke left his lodging and walked quite alone up the steep hillside from the little town to the entrance of the castle.

At the gate he paused, and drew from his pocket a small package. He wished to see her Highness, it appeared, upon an affair of moment. He thought the seal he bore would be a warrant for his admission to her private rooms. He displayed a finely-cut seal, with Erica's own initials graven on it along with the royal arms of his duchy. He had given it to her at the time of their betrothal, and the chamberlain knew that a gentleman possessing such a token must have come upon urgent business.

He showed the Duke to a small room, in which it was Erica's habit to transact her philanthropic business, and in which she interviewed her agents and kept her neat accounts.

The little place was full of her orderliness and capacity. The neatly-filed papers, the books of reference, the carefully-docketed bills and correspondence, the pigeon-holes and tin boxes—they all brought back to the wretched man the wonderful and brief blossoming time of his life, when he had fitted up for her in Abendland just such a room and encouraged her to just such pursuits.

On the desk lay a small enamelled box in which she kept sweetmeats, and with which he had often played. A silver vase of violets stood by it, a lace handkerchief and two or three bracelets, pushed off to give the small, eager hand greater freedom. He hung over the things in agony, brooding over them in a sort of luxury of grief. He lost count of time, as his mind went back along the past, longing vainly for another trial, to have his chance of pleasing her over again.

He did not hear the door open; but a wind fanned his cheek, and he lifted his eyes to see his wife's slim form outlined in the doorway.

She hesitated—painfully, it seemed. Half her mind was for flight; the other half all undecided. There was no resentment in the look she bent on him.

He bowed courteously, without speaking. She closed the door behind her, but she did not advance. "Why have you come?" she breathed, hardly above a whisper.

"Madam," he replied, "I think you can divine the one only subject which could have induced me to ask you to endure the sight of me for a few minutes."

She stared at him, and then slowly shook her head, intimating without words that she was at a loss to explain his visit.

"Nobody knows that I am here—nobody knows of my presence in Bolewitz," he assured her. "From this interview I go straight to the railway station, and shall in all probability never trouble you again. But the news I heard yesterday constrained me to come to you."

"The news?" said Erica, tremulously. The scarlet colour which had flooded her delicate face had all ebbed, leaving her rather white. He brought forward a chair for her, and she sat down as though glad of its support. She was more shaken at the sight of him than he had supposed would be the case.

"Can you undertake," he gently asked, "that for a short time we shall be undisturbed?"

She made a little movement with her

hand. "Lock—lock the door." He crossed the room and did so. Then, returning to her, plunged into his subject with no more ado, because he could not tell how long his self-control would serve him. "Yes," he said, "Hildebrand came to see me yesterday."

She raised large, astonished eyes to his face. Evidently this was not what she had expected to hear. "Hildebrand?" she echoed. "Well—how does that concern me?"

"Perhaps you have forgotten," he said in confusion, for the sight of her perturbed him even more profoundly than he had anticipated; "you see, it is a question of State—Hildebrand is my heir—he cannot marry without my consent."

He paused, thinking that now she must see it all; but she still stared wonderingly in his face.

He took a turn once through the room, then came and stood before her, facing her steadily. "You must answer me one question," he sternly said. "Do you love him? If so, if you really think that he would make you happy—I will not offer any objection. It was this I had to find out."

She had sprung from her chair, the blood once more flying to her face, her eyes alight, her expression indignant.

"I cannot think what you are talking about!" she said.

"Ah, you think I have no right; but I know that I have," he said under his breath. "You have divorced me, but I can never, never, all my wretched life, divorce you. Since first I saw you you have filled every corner of my life; and now the mocking fates, when you thought you had got rid of me entirely, have thrust into my hand the chance to decide your destiny a second time. It falls to me—me, who made you so unhappy, who so wholly failed in my first attempt—I must make no second mistake—surely you see that? If I give Hildebrand my leave to win you I must have some assurance that you think you—could——"

He left off speaking, because he was so absorbed in watching her face.

Her eyes were on the ground, and she seemed filled with indignation, or some other stormy emotion.

"So Hildebrand told you—that he was wooing me?" she inquired.

"Yes. He said he had reason to believe that he—that you—cared."

"And you believed him?"

"No; for two reasons. First, I do not readily believe Hildebrand, for he is habitually inaccurate. Second, *I* never believe tales without personal inquiry."

She started at that. It was said with a quiet sting. "If," she said almost inaudibly, "if you will remember the facts of—of—our parting, you will see one reason why I should not marry Hildebrand."

"No, madam," said the Duke; "I own that I see none, so far."

She made a movement of resentment. "That is ungenerous," she said. "If my standard was then so high, do you think I have since lowered it?"

He hesitated a moment. "Let us be frank, madam," he then said gently. "You divorced me because you did not love me. The idle tale, which nobody took the trouble to investigate, was merely the weapon you seized to rid yourself of a bondage you found intolerable."

## ¶

SHE turned away to the window with a sound of anger and stood with her back to him, lacing and unlacing her fingers. "How can you?" she flung over her shoulder. "Not investigated! Why, you never even took the trouble to deny it."

"Certainly not. You were fighting for escape. I loved you too well to help take any part in showing you that your bonds could not be cut."

She faced about suddenly, lifting her hands to her throat as if she felt a sensation of choking.

"Then—then," she faltered, gaspingly, "it was—not—true?"

Maurice raised his eyelids, gazing upon her quivering face with all the intentness of his blue, steady eyes. "That, madam," he said, "is a question which cannot now be raised between us—it is in the past. I did not come here with the intention of re-opening a closed matter, but because I am so anxious for your future happiness. Pray believe this."

She remained as if rooted to the ground, staring upon him. Having spoken, he looked down, for the sight of the changeful features he remembered was sheer physical anguish. He felt cold, though the evening was so lovely; the moisture stood upon his forehead, and as he pushed back a lock of his black, fast-silvering hair from his face, he could feel that it was damp.

It seemed as though, quite suddenly, anger against him welled up in her. "What concern of yours is it if I should love Hildebrand?" she asked mutinously.

"I thought that I had made that plain, madam."

"It — it was — an intrusion," she stammered.

"I know it. But it was unavoidable. What!" he cried with sudden passion. "Do you realise what it would mean for me to have you living there, at Court, as you must?—ah, no!—you think me incapable of the feeling that would animate another man. Forgive me, then. I will go. Just tell me that you—love—this fellow, and I will go away and make things as easy for you as I can."

She paced the length of the little room twice, then came back to him. She stood before him, her hands behind her back. "You thought I broke our marriage because I did not care for you? You honestly thought that?"

"No, madam. I knew it."

"It is not true. It was because I had—begun—to care. Do you think I should have minded what you did if there was nothing between us but just an affair of State? But I *was* beginning to care—desperately; and that was too dreadful! The thought of setting my heart on a man who could——"

She hid her face in her hands, turning away.

The room was very silent. The strains of the Court band, playing exquisitely in the Hofgarten below, came up through the open window. The pause went on until Erica thought that she must scream. Then she heard his voice, close to her ear.

"Erica," he said, "there was some truth in it. It was not wholly false; but it was ancient history. Since first I saw you there has never for one moment been a question of my allegiance. I challenge any man or woman in my duchy to say otherwise."

She turned abruptly away, half-blinded with a sudden rush of tears. Groping her way to the chair he had set for her, she sat down and drew out a wispy lawn handkerchief. She could not very well see what she was doing, and the little morsel of lace fell to the ground. Maurice picked it up, going down on his knees to do so—and held it out to her; but as she did not seem to notice his action, he came a little nearer, and, hardly able to believe in his own daring, put one hand against her charmingly-arranged hair, while with the other he wiped away the drops that welled from under her closed lids. She gave one or two deep sobs, but in no way sought to escape his touch.

"Oh!" said she at last, "I can't think how you could!"

"How I could let you go?"

"Oh, no, that is easy to believe—only think what a pig I was! How unpopular I made myself, with my airs and graces—the difficulties I landed you in! No, I mean how could you have thought that I would love Hildebrand?"

"I didn't want to think so. That was why I came to make sure," he said patiently. "He is not, in my opinion, the kind of man whom such as you could love; but one never knows."

"And would you"—the handkerchief was pushed away, the sweet, drenched eyes looked up at him as she grasped the back of her chair—"if you had found that I, who judged *you* not good enough, had fallen in love with—*that!*—would you still have gone on loving me?"

"I don't think it's a question of whether I would," he answered. "I don't believe I can help it."

She bowed her head upon her hands, and another gush of tears came. "Oh, I don't deserve it—Maurice, I don't deserve it! But I seem to have learned so much since you let me go! I thought you would fight, and come to me and tell me you could not lose me, and say—the kind of things you used to say—and that we should have made it up. I could not believe that you were really going to stand aside and see me pass out. It was the best thing that could possibly have happened to me. It showed me so very clearly what a failure I had been."

"Sweetheart!" said Maurice shakily, laying his hands again upon her coronal of bright hair. "Take care! Don't be cruel! If I am to say good-bye and go in an hour or two, then this is the worst moment of my life."

The Duchess Erica rose to her feet. She stood before him meekly.

"What, you won't make it easy for me? Well, you are right, as usual. I must say out just what I mean, and it is this. I am sorry—will you forgive me? And—and—if, as you say, you love me still—take me home again!"

And so, in one transcendent moment, his craving heart, his empty arms, were filled.

When next he stood in the embrasure of his own library window in Reussberg, and listened—no longer alone—to the rushing flood, it seemed to him that the note had changed completely.

The sadness, the unrest, were gone; the song that the river sang was a song of progress, of pressing forward rejoicingly to a glorious goal, hand in hand with the woman who had always possessed his heart, and who, with characteristic thoroughness, had at last given him hers.

# *Burton on Old Superstitions*

WATER-DEVILS are those *Naiades* or *Water-nymphs* which have been heretofore conversant about waters and rivers. . . . *Paracelsus* hath several stories of them that have lived and been married to mortal men, and so continued for certain years with them, and after, upon some dislike, have forsaken them. Such a one was *Egeria*, with whom *Numa* was so familiar, *Diana*, *Ceres*, etc. *Olaus Magnus* hath a long narration of one *Hotherus*, a King of *Sweden*, that, having lost his company, as he was hunting one day, met with these Water-nymphs or Fairies, and was feasted by them; and *Hector Boethius*, of *Macbeth* and *Banquo*, two Scottish Lords, that, as they were wandering in the woods, had their fortunes told them by three strange women. . . . Terrestrial devils are those *Lares*, *Genii*, *Fauns*, *Satyrs*, *Wood-nymphs*, *Foliots*, *Fairies*, *Robin Goodfellows*, *Trolli*, etc., which as they are most conversant with men, so they do them most harm. . . . Some put our *Fairies* into this rank, which have been in former times adored with much superstition, with sweeping their houses, and setting of a pail of clean water, good victuals, and the like, and then they should not be pinched, but find money in their shoes, and be fortunate in their enterprises. These are they that dance on heaths and greens. . . . *Paracelsus* reckons up many places in *Germany* where they do usually walk in little coats some two foot long. A bigger kind there is of them, called with us *Hobgoblins* and *Robin Goodfellows*, that would in those superstitious times grind corn for a mess of milk, cut wood, or do any manner of drudgery work. . . . So likewise those . . . that walk about midnight on great heaths and desert places, which . . . draw men out of the way, and lead them all night a by-way . . . we commonly call them *Pucks*. In the deserts of Lop in Asia such illusions of walking spirits are often perceived, as you may read in *Marco Polo* the *Venetian* his travels. . . . Sometimes they sit by the highway side, to give men falls, and make their horses stumble and start as they ride, if you will believe the relation of that holy man *Ketellus*, in *Nubrigensis*, that had an especial grace to see devils . . . and talk with them . . . without offence; and if a man curse or spur his horse for stumbling, they do heartily rejoice at it; with many such pretty feats.

# *The Last Word*

HERE lies Fred,
Who was alive and is dead.
Had it been his father,
I had much rather;
Had it been his brother,
Still better than the other;
Had it been his sister,
No one would have missed her;
Had it been the whole generation,
All the better for the nation;
But since 'tis only Fred
That was alive and is dead,
Why, there's no more to be said.

*Jacobite Epitaph on Frederick, Prince of Wales.*

HERE lies a poor woman who always was tired
She lived in a house where help was not hired.
Her last words on earth were: "Dear friends, I am going
Where washing ain't done, nor sweeping, nor sewing;
But everything there is exact to my wishes,
For where they don't eat there's no washing of dishes;
I'll be where loud anthems will always be ringing,
But, having no voice, I'll be clear of the singing.
Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me never,
I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever."

*Tired Woman's Epitaph.* ANON.

## ON NELL BACHELOR, A PIE-WOMAN

BENEATH in the dust, the mouldy old crust
Of Nell Bachelor lately was shoven;
Who was skilled in the arts of pies, custards, and tarts,
And knew every use of the oven.
When she liv'd long enough, she made her last puff,
A puff by her husband much praised;
Now here she doth lie, and makes a dirt-pie,
In hopes that her crust will be raised.

HERE a pretty baby lies,
Sung asleep with lullabies;
Pray be silent, and not stir
Th' easy earth that covers her.

R. HERRICK.

BENEATH this stone old Abra'm lies;
Nobody laughs and nobody cries;
Where's he gone or how he fares,
Nobody knows, and no one cares.

*On Abraham Newland, Chief Cashier of the Bank of England* (d. 1807).

YET the work itself shall not be lost, for it will (as he believed) appear once more in a new and more beautiful edition, corrected and amended by The Author.

B. FRANKLIN (*on Himself*).

## ON A COUNTRY COBBLER

BENEATH this green hillock lies honest Dick Hall,
Whose service was courted by fair, brown, nay, all,
For his life was employed just to keep, in foul weather,
All harm from your feet, by the strength of his leather.
His wax was so smooth, his ends were so strong,
His workmanship good, and so pleading his song,
That the neighbours would oft at his stall listen hours,
To hear "Derry Down," "Hearts of Oak," "Social Powers."
And though it seems strange, for, truth, 'tis well known,
He'd repair other soles, but neglected his own;
Yet, wishing the future might mend by the past,
He liv'd fifty years, and then—Death stole his last.

# That Brute Simmons

*The comedy of a too much married man*

## By ARTHUR MORRISON

SIMMONS'S infamous behaviour toward his wife is still matter for profound wonderment among the neighbours. The other women had all along regarded him as a model husband, and certainly Mrs. Simmons was a most conscientious wife. She toiled and slaved for that man, as any woman in the whole street would have maintained, far more than any husband had a right to expect. And now this was what she got for it. Perhaps he had suddenly gone mad.

Before she married Simmons, Mrs. Simmons had been the widowed Mrs. Ford. Ford had got a berth as donkeyman on a tramp steamer, and that steamer had gone down with all hands off the Cape—a judgment, the widow woman feared, for long years of contumacy which had culminated in the wickedness of taking to the sea, and taking to it as a donkeyman—an immeasurable fall for a capable engine-fitter. Twelve years as Mrs. Ford had left her still childless, and childless she remained as Mrs. Simmons.

As for Simmons, he, it was held, was fortunate in that capable wife. He was a moderately good carpenter and joiner, but no man of the world, and he wanted one. Nobody could tell what might not have happened to Tommy Simmons if there had been no Mrs. Simmons to take care of him. He was a meek and quiet man, with a boyish face and sparse, limp whiskers. He had no vices (even his pipe departed him after his marriage), and Mrs. Simmons had engrafted on him divers exotic virtues. He went solemnly to chapel every Sunday, under a tall hat, and put a penny—one returned to him for the purpose out of his week's wages—in the plate. Then, Mrs. Simmons overseeing, he took off his best clothes and brushed them with solicitude and pains. On Saturday afternoons he cleaned the knives, the forks, the boots, the kettles and the windows, patiently and conscientiously. On Tuesday evenings he took the clothes to the mangling. And on Saturday nights he attended Mrs. Simmons in her marketing, to carry the parcels.

Mrs. Simmons's own virtues were native and numerous. She was a wonderful manager. Every penny of Tommy's thirty-six or thirty-eight shillings a week was bestowed to the greatest advantage, and Tommy never ventured to guess how much of it she saved. Her cleanliness in housewifery was distracting to behold. She met Simmons at the front door whenever he came home, and then and there he changed his boots for slippers, balancing himself painfully on alternate feet on the cold flags. This was because she scrubbed the passage and doorstep turn about with the wife of the downstairs family, and because the stair-carpet was her own. She vigilantly supervised her husband all through the process of "cleaning himself" after work, so as to come between her walls and the possibility of random splashes; and if, in spite of her diligence a spot remained to tell the tale, she was at pains to impress the fact on Simmons's memory, and to set forth at length all the circumstances of his ungrateful selfishness. In the beginning she had always escorted him to the ready-made clothes shop and had selected and paid for his clothes—for the reason that men are such perfect fools and shopkeepers do as they like with them. But she presently improved on that. She found a man selling cheap remnants at a street corner, and straightway she conceived the idea of making Simmons's clothes herself. Decision was one of her virtues, and a suit of uproarious check tweeds was begun that afternoon from the pattern furnished by an old one.

More—it was finished by Sunday; when Simmons, overcome by astonishment at the feat, was indued in it and pushed off to chapel ere he could recover his senses. The things were not altogether comfortable, he found; the trousers clung tight against his shins, but hung loose behind his heels;

and when he sat it was on a wilderness of hard folds and seams. Also his waistcoat collar tickled his nape, but his coat collar went straining across from shoulder to shoulder, while the main garment bagged generously below his waist. Use made a habit of his discomfort, but it never reconciled him to the chaff of his shopmates; for as Mrs. Simmons elaborated successive suits, each one modelled on the last, the primal accidents of her design developed into principles, and grew even bolder and more hideously pronounced. It was vain for Simmons to hint—as hint he did—that he shouldn't like her to overwork herself, tailoring being bad for the eyes, and there was a new tailor's in the Mile End Road, very cheap, where . . . "Ho yus," she retorted, "you're very consid'rit, I dessay, sittin' there actin' a livin' lie before your own wife, Thomas Simmons, as though I couldn't see through you like a book. A lot you care about overworkin' me as long as *your* turn's served throwin' away money like dirt in the street on a lot o' swindlin' tailors an' me workin' an' slavin' 'ere to save a 'apenny, an' this is my return for it; anyone 'ud think you could pick up money in the 'orseroad, an' I b'lieve I'd be thought better of if I laid in bed all day like some would, that I do." So that Thomas Simmons avoided the subject, nor even murmured when she resolved to cut his hair.

So his placid fortune endured for years. Then there came a golden summer evening when Mrs. Simmons betook herself with a basket to do some small shopping, and Simmons was left at home. He washed and put away the tea things, and then he fell to meditating on a new pair of trousers, finished that day and hanging behind the parlour door. There they hung, in all their decent innocence of shape in the seat, and they were shorter of leg, longer of waist, and wilder of pattern than he had ever worn before. And as he looked on them the small devil of Original Sin awoke and clamoured in his breast. He was ashamed of it, of course, for well he knew the gratitude he owed his wife for those same trousers, among other blessings. Still, there the small devil was, and the small devil was fertile in base suggestions and could not be kept from hinting at the new crop of workshop gibes that would spring at Tommy's first public appearance in such things.

"Pitch 'em in the dustbin!" said the small devil at last. "It's all they're fit for."

Simmons turned away in sheer horror of his wicked self, and for a moment thought of washing the tea things over again by way of discipline. Then he made for the back room, but saw from the landing that the front door was standing open, probably by the fault of the child downstairs. Now a front door standing open was a thing that Mrs. Simmons would *not* abide; it looked low. So Simmons went down, that she might not be wroth with him for the thing when she came back; and, as he shut the door, he looked forth into the street.

A man was loitering on the pavement and prying curiously about the door. His face was tanned, his hands were deep in the pockets of his unbraced blue trousers; and well back on his head he wore the high-crowned peaked cap, topped with a knob of wool, which is affected by Jack ashore about the docks. He lurched a step nearer to the door and "Mrs. Ford ain't in, is she?" he said.

Simmons stared at him for a matter of five seconds, and then said: "Eh?"

"Mrs. Ford as was, then—Simmons now, ain't it?"

He said this with a furtive leer that Simmons neither liked nor understood.

"No," said Simmons, "she ain't in now."

"You ain't her 'usband, are ye?"

"Yus."

The man took his pipe from his mouth and grinned silently and long. "Blimy," he said at length, "you look the sort o' bloke she'd like"—and with that he grinned again. Then, seeing that Simmons made ready to shut the door, he put a foot on the sill and a hand against the panel. "Don't be in a 'urry, matey," he said. "I come 'ere t'ave a little talk with you, man to man, d'ye see?" And he frowned fiercely.

Tommy Simmons felt uncomfortable, but the door would not shut, so he parleyed. "Wotjer want?" he asked. "I dunno you."

"Then, if you'll excuse the liberty, I'll interdooce meself, in a manner of speaking." He touched his cap with a bob of mock humility. "I'm Bob Ford," he said, "come back out o' kingdom-come, so to say. Me as went down with the *Mooltan*—safe dead five year agone. I come to see my wife."

During this speech, Thomas Simmons's

jaw was dropping lower and lower. At the end of it he poked his fingers up through his hair, looked down at the mat, then up at the fanlight, then out into the street, then hard at his visitor. But he found nothing to say.

"Come to see my wife," the man repeated. "So now we can talk it over—as man to man."

¶

SIMMONS slowly shut his mouth and led the way upstairs mechanically, his fingers still in his hair. A sense of the state of affairs sank gradually into his brain, and the small devil woke again. Suppose this man *was* Ford? Suppose he *did* claim his wife? Would it be a knock-down blow? Would it hit him out?—or not? He thought of the trousers, the tea things, the mangling, the knives, the kettles and the windows; and he thought of them in the way of a backslider.

On the landing, Ford clutched at his arm and asked in a hoarse whisper: "'Ow long 'fore she's back?"

"'Bout a hour, I expect," Simmons replied, having first of all repeated the question in his own mind. And then he opened the parlour door.

"Ah," said Ford, looking about him, "you've bin pretty comf'table. Them chairs an' things"—jerking his pipe toward them—"was hers—mine that is to say, speaking straight, and man to man." He sat down, puffing meditatively at his pipe, and presently: "Well," he continued, "'ere I am agin, ol' Bob Ford dead an' done for—gawn down in the *Mooltan*. On'y I *ain't* done for, see?"—and he pointed the stem of his pipe at Simmons's waistcoat—"I ain't done for, 'cause why? Cons'kence o' bein' picked up by a ol' German sailin'-'utch an' took to 'Frisco 'fore the mast. I've 'ad a few years o' knockin' about since then, an' now"—looking hard at Simmons—"I've come back to see my wife."

"She—she don't like smoke in 'ere," said Simmons, as it were at random.

"No, I bet she don't," Ford answered, taking his pipe from his mouth and holding it low in his hand. "I know 'Anner. 'Ow d'you find 'er? Do she make ye clean the winders?"

"Well," Simmons admitted uneasily, "I—I do 'elp 'er sometimes, o' course."

"Ah! An' the knives too, I bet, an' the bloomin' kittles. I know. Wy"—he rose and bent to look behind Simmons's head—"s'elp me, I b'lieve she cuts yer 'air! Well, I'm damned! Jes' wot she would do, too."

He inspected the blushing Simmons from divers points of vantage. Then he lifted a leg of the trousers hanging behind the door. "I'd bet a trifle," he said, "she made these 'ere trucks. Nobody else 'ud do 'em like that. Damme—they're wuss'n wot you're got on."

The small devil began to have the argument all its own way. If this man took his wife back, perhaps he'd have to wear those trousers.

"Ah!" Ford pursued. "She ain't got no milder. An' my davy, wot a jore!"

Simmons began to feel that this was no longer his business. Plainly, 'Anner was this other man's wife, and he was bound in honour to acknowledge the fact. The small devil put it to him as a matter of duty.

"Well," said Ford suddenly, "time's short an' this ain't business. I won't be 'ard on you, matey. I ought prop'ly to stand on my rights; but, seein' as you're a well-meanin' young man, so to speak, an' all settled an' a-livin' 'ere quiet an' matrimonual, I'll"—this with a burst of generosity—"damme, yus, I'll compound the felony, an' take me 'ook. Come, I'll name a figure, as man to man, fust an' last, no less an' no more. Five pound does it."

Simmons hadn't five pounds—he hadn't even five pence—and he said so. "An' I wouldn't think for to come between a man an' 'is wife," he added, "not on no account. It may be rough on me, but it's a dooty. *I'll* 'ook it."

"No," said Ford hastily, clutching Simmons by the arm, "don't do that. I'll make it a bit cheaper. Say three quid—come, that's reasonable, ain't it? Three quid ain't much compensation for me goin' away for ever—where the stormy winds do blow, so to say—an' never as much as seein' me own wife agin for better nor wuss. Between man an' man now—three quid; an' I'll shunt. That's fair, ain't it?"

"Of course it's fair," Simmons replied effusively. "It's more'n fair; it's noble—downright noble, *I* call it. But I ain't goin' to take a mean advantage o' your good-'artedness, Mr. Ford. She's your wife, an' I oughtn't to 'a' come between you. I apologise. You stop an' 'ave yer

proper rights. It's me as ought to shunt, an' I will." And he made a step toward the door.

" 'Old on," quoth Ford, and got between Simmons and the door ; " don't do things rash. Look wot a loss it'll be to you with no 'ome to go to, an' nobody to look after ye, an' all that. It'll be dreadful. Say a couple—there, we won't quarrel, jest a single quid, between man an' man, an' I'll stand a pot out o' the money. You can easy raise a quid—the clock 'ud pretty nigh do it. A quid does it ; an' I'll——"

There was a loud double-knock at the front door. In the East End a double-knock is always for the upstairs lodgers.

" Oo's that ? " asked Bob Ford apprehensively.

" I'll see," said Thomas Simmons in reply, and he made a rush for the staircase.

Bob Ford heard him open the front door. Then he went to the window and, just below him, he saw the crown of a bonnet. It vanished and, borne to him from within the door, there fell upon his ear the sound of a well-remembered female voice.

" Where ye goin' now with no 'at ? " asked the voice sharply.

" Awright, 'Anner—there's—there's somebody upstairs to see you," Simmons answered. And, as Bob Ford could see, a man went scuttling down the street in the gathering dusk. And, behold, it was Thomas Simmons.

Ford reached the landing in three strides. His wife was still at the front door, staring after Simmons. He flung into the back room, threw open the window, dropped from the washhouse roof into the backyard, scrambled desperately over the fence and disappeared into the gloom. He was seen by no living soul. And that is why Simmons's base desertion—under his wife's very eyes, too—is still an astonishment to the neighbours.

# *The Resolve*

TELL me not of a face that's fair,
  Nor lip and cheek that's red,
Nor of the tresses of her hair,
  Nor curls in order laid,
Nor of a rare seraphic voice
  That like an angel sings ;
Though if I were to take my choice
  I would have all these things :
But if that thou wilt have me love,
  And it must be a she,
The only argument can move
  Is that she will love me.

The glories of your ladies be
  But metaphors of things,
And but resemble what we see
  Each common object brings.
Roses out-red their lips and cheeks,
  Lilies their whiteness stain ;
What fool is he that shadows seeks
  And may the substance gain ?
Then if thou'lt have me love a lass,
  Let it be one that's kind :
Else I'm a servant to the glass
  That's with Canary lined.

ALEXANDER BROME.

# Golden Beads and Poppy Seeds

*"Oh, when my treasure ship comes in"*

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

ALWAYS it has been my great desire to set down something concerning my father and my mother, and also of Little Isobel and of the strange happenings on the good ship *Prester John*, from out the port of Liverpool. It is a desire that has remained with me for many, many years.

I also desired greatly to tell of the ship's cook, who could write poetry upon any subject that a person could mention; of the blue-eyed boy from Bangor, in Carnarvon, who talked to the sea and understood its ways in a manner so marvellous that it was plain the Almighty had given him special understanding concerning His waters; and of Lowery Finch, Ned Spillane and others. There was also Mr. Colvin, the first officer, whom we buried in the deepest grave in the world, the Tuscarora Trough, which runs down for a distance greater than that between the London, Midland and Scottish station at Lime Street and Aintree! "A great grave for a sailorman," said my father gently as poor Mr. Colvin slipped down into the green waters. "The Lord dug it for seamen." And there was a girl, too, a wonder girl, whose eyes were anchors for roving hearts, and there were other men who sailed with my father and my mother—splendid, brave, clean-hearted men who had the great gift of simplicity which God gives to those He loves.

Yesterday I mentioned this great desire of mine to my wife, a little afraid of what she might think of my craving to write of these things when I am but a sailor and know nothing of the art of writing. She was silent for a few minutes, her head lowered over the teeny-weeny shirt she was making, a shirt so small, by the way, that I doubt if there could be born a living creature that could get inside it; then she spoke.

"And why not, Big Seahorse?" she said softly, "It is a sweet story and I am sure many people would love to read it."

And then, because she approved of my desire, I grew afraid as men sometimes do when their wives are enthusiastic of some scheme which they have mentioned boastingly, but which they know is for bigger minds than theirs.

"I don't know how to begin, Light o' the Dawn," I stammered. "I know the sea and the winds and the stars, but words puzzle me."

"My mother told me that truth has its own legs, Big Seahorse," said my wife softly; then, after a little pause, she added in a low whisper: "Tell it as you would tell it to our little baby, as you surely will tell it to him when he grows big enough to understand."

So I am taking the advice of my wife, because good wives are wise wives, and I am setting the story down here, simply and without art, hoping that a few who read it will say: "The sailor's father and mother were like my father and mother, the good, gentle people of the long ago."

It is strange that the cook who could write poetry was the first person who really made me understand who I was, who my parents were, and what was happening around me. I knew in a vague way, but the cook put my vague beliefs into definite shape. I was only a little chap of five when he wrote those verses on the deck of the *Prester John* as we swung out of the Mersey with all sails drawing, but I will never forget them. I have always thought they were very good verses, and I know that I was amazed then, and am still amazed, at the speed with which he wrote them. He penned them in a few minutes on the deck of a rolling ship, with his mind on the stew that he was cooking for supper.

I will copy the verses down from the same piece of paper on which he wrote

them, four-and-twenty years ago. They run:

The beautiful, splendid ship you're on
Is known by the name of *Prester John;*
Your daddy's the captain, and there's a fine crew
Of muscular Britons who know what to do.
Your mother sails with us—a lady is she
The kindest and best woman I've found at sea;
The mate, Mr. Colvin, from Birkenhead came,
And he knows all the tricks that are used in this game.
The food it is good, and no sailor feels
That he doesn't get plenty when sitting at meals;
And if at the tail of these verses you'll look,
You'll see that the poet is also the cook.

FREDERICK WILSON,
Cook on sailing ship *Prester John*,
On the High Seas.

All the cook's verses were signed in this fashion, the words "On the High Seas" being never omitted. He could not write in ports. He told me that harbours were not inspiring places, but the big waters made him write. A sweet, good man was the cook. He loved my father and my mother.

My father was from Portsmouth. He was a very big man, very tall and straight and very, very strong. Later in this story I will tell of his strength. He knew of tides and currents in a wonderful way. Many captains of ships in all the ports of the world would come aboard the *Prester John* and ask his opinion, and once in a foreign port, whose people were not so friendly to England, a British admiral, all covered with gold lace, came to the *Prester John* when my father was sleeping. The first officer received him, and the admiral said quietly: "I would like to speak to Captain John Whittemore if it is convenient, I want his advice." I was told later when I grew up that what my father told the admiral that day was of great use later when trouble broke out and British warships entered the harbour. The admiral wrote and thanked my father, but I do not mention this in a bragging spirit. I put it down to show that my father's knowledge of the sea was great.

My mother was a sweet woman from Bideford, who deserved the praise given her by the cook in the verses I have written down. She was very kind and gentle, and all the men that ever sailed on the *Prester John* loved her greatly and would do anything for her. There was one exception, which I will tell of in due time. To my father the paring of her finger-nail was more than the *Prester John*, although the *Prester John* was to him the grandest ship that ever wet her forefoot.

And now, having written this introduction, I must tell of the coming of my little sister Isobel for, truthfully, this story mostly concerns my little sister, she being the central figure in the queer happenings.

Isobel was born on the *Prester John* at four bells in the morning watch while the ship was heading bravely up through the Karimata Strait that joins the China Sea to the Java Sea. There was a smooth sea, and the *Prester John* was, so I have been told, spinning along under full canvas, her lee scuppers smothered in foam, The mate had presented his compliments to my father and asked if he should take in sail, but my mother, when my father asked her, only smiled and shook her head, so the stork came aboard the *Prester John* while the old ship was logging sixteen knots with her royal and topgallant sails set. I remember when I came up on deck that a pennant was flying from the mainmast.

My father and my mother had prepared for the coming of Little Isobel by shipping at Brisbane, Queensland, a large, fat woman, named Mrs. Budd, who was to go with us as far as Singapore. Mrs. Budd was not a good sailor, and when the *Prester John* ran into a breeze off the Great Barrier Reef she told my father that she had changed her mind about her contract, and that she wished to leave the ship at Cooktown, at which port we had to call.

My father was much upset because, although he was big and strong and knew the sea in a way that was amazing to other captains, he knew nothing of matters upon which Mrs. Budd was an authority. He pleaded with her; he offered her any sum of money that she might name; he offered her his half-share in the *Prester John*, because his love for my mother was very great, but Mrs. Budd only wanted solid ground and nothing else. My father consulted with Mr. Colvin, the mate, and Mr. Colvin mentioned the matter to one or two of the crew. It was in this way that the story came to the ears of the cook, and I will always think sweet thoughts of the cook for the manner in which he rose to the occasion and, by a simple gift conferred upon him by the Almighty, did what gold had failed to do. The moment the cook heard that Mrs. Budd intended to desert the ship, the poor, good-hearted fellow locked himself in his caboose and wrote a lot of verses to her—fourteen verses if I remember rightly—and the moment Mrs.

Budd came up on deck to get a little air, the cook, cap in hand, took a nice clean copy of the verses and presented them to her. I have heard of many things that have been done by men, but I have never heard of anything that had the sweet childishness of the task that the cook set himself.

I can only remember a few lines of that poem. I will write them here :

Oh, Mrs. Budd, how we deplore
Your decision as to Singapore !
The ship will miss your kindly face
And there'll be none to take your place !

Stay with us, Mrs. Budd, we pray,
The sea will smoother get each day.
The Lord will think when you are gone
Of your kindness on the *Prester John*.

Mrs. Budd was delighted with the cook's poem. No one had ever written verses about her in her whole life, which I suppose is in no way surprising, and two hours after receiving the poem she told my father she would stay on the ship. And this she did. A French captain at Marseilles told me that in olden times many poets walked about the roads of France singing verses they made up about the great ladies in the castles, and he said the great ladies liked these poets, who were called troubadours. He said the cook of the *Prester John* was a troubadour, but I never heard anyone call him by that name. I don't think he would have liked it, because the only two women he wrote verses about were my mother and Mrs. Budd.

There was never a prettier baby than little Isobel—at least, I have never seen a prettier one. And it was curious, now that I come to think about it, the effect her coming had upon the *Prester John*. I mean on the crew and their relations to my father and mother. As the years slipped by and little Isobel was able to toddle round, she became the pet of the whole ship, and the first thing most of the men thought of when going ashore at some port was to buy a little present for Isobel. She made the *Prester John* a sort of community ship, and that is a bit unusual. There was nothing of the milk-and-water-let-us-all-be-brothers business about my father's ship, but seamen liked the atmosphere of the *Prester John*. Men shipped with my father time after time, and when they left they tried to apologize for leaving.

I remember Jumbo Phillips, a big man from Gloucester, who sailed with my father on seven voyages. Jumbo went ashore at Durban, Natal, and the ship sailed without him. When the *Prester John* reached Capetown there was a letter from Jumbo, a letter that looked as if he had written it with a stanchion dipped in tar, and my father read it to the crew. Jumbo had fallen in love with a Boer girl who had a farm out on the veldt, and Jumbo asked that his kit be divided up, and that the two little Kaffir dolls that he was keeping for Isobel's birthday be handed to her mother, and given to her with his respectful good wishes when her birthday came.

## ¶

THEY were nice days, those. I was beginning to be useful, and the ports that we went to in those years were the most wonderful ports that I have ever seen. Many of them I have seen since, but they do not look the same as when the *Prester John* came creeping in with my father giving orders and Mr. Colvin as busy as anything, and my mother holding little Isobel up to see the bumboats and the coloured men that always came round selling little things to the sailors. Ports at the end of everywhere that were magic ports to a boy. I can cry as I think of what they were in those days. Penang, where my father took little Isobel and me to the great Chinese temple at Ayer Itam, where there is a living tortoise older than the pyramids, who wears a little plate of gold on his back because he recognized Buddha when the great teacher visited the place. At least, that is what the monks told my father. I am but a sailorman, and I do not know. Foochow, where Mr. Colvin, the mate, bought a box of candied fruit that was the most wonderful fruit in all the world, little peaches called *toa* and plums called *haingmwi* that were glorious. He bought them for Isobel, but my mother gave me a lot of them. And she made my father eat some, too, although he seldom ate anything like that. He said he looked like a fool eating sweets, but mother found him one day taking one of the little sugar plums out of the box when he thought no one saw him. My mother and my father laughed a lot over that plum.

And there was Shanghai, where Lowery Finch bought for a dollar a great piece of yellow silk on which were two hundred green snakes. He brought it back to a girl in Liverpool but when he went to the girl's place he found that she had got married,

so he gave the piece of silk to a woman who kept a sailors' boarding-house. They were very wonderful snakes, and they were so hard to count that Lowery Finch, Ned Spillane, Gobby Brown and others of the crew spent hours counting them over and over, and each time making them different. And I remember other ports, scores of them, into which the brave old *Prester John* wandered in those days when little Isobel was young. It was during those days that the cook wrote the poem about my father, and in that poem were these lines :

The little ports have little loads they give to little ships,
Of rubber, copra, fruit and nuts, copal and log-wood chips.
The brave old *Prester John* goes in and gets her her little store,
And when our captain gives the word we're on the road once more.

It is a strange thing about the cook's poetry, but I find it the only poetry I can really understand. Now and then my wife reads me little pieces, but I cannot make any sense out of them. I have seen men like Lowery Finch, who was a very rough man and a great fighter, cry like a baby over something that the cook had written.

Little Isobel was four years of age when we buried Mr. Colvin in the Tuscarora Trough. A great loss to my father. I can see my father now as he stood reading the service with all the men standing around, the *Prester John*, stripped of canvas, rolling a little as if she, too, was in pain because Mr. Colvin was leaving her. A very impressive service it was, and my father's voice booming out the splendid words into the silence that the cook said " was like the listening ear of God." I thought of it often.

We reached Liverpool four months later, the *Prester John* making the trip from Hongkong to the Mersey in 109 days, which was a great work for a ship like her, and at Liverpool my father had a disagreement with Mr. Silas Hume, who owned a half interest in the ship. I don't know how Mr. Hume obtained an interest in the *Prester John ;* I think he advanced money to an uncle of my father while my father was away on a voyage, and the uncle died before my father returned.

There was, so I have heard, constant friction between Mr. Silas Hume and my father, Mr. Hume being under the belief that the *Prester John* was not making enough money. He blamed my father, and said that my father fed the men better food than he, Mr. Hume, had at his own table, which, as the cook said, " might be true, or it might not."

Mr. Silas Hume was over seventy years of age ; he was bent nearly double, and he suffered from palsy ; but in spite of his years and his afflictions he loved money greatly. He and my father had a difference concerning the man who would take Mr. Colvin's place on the *Prester John*, and through some clause in the papers of partnership Mr. Silas Hume was able to combat my father and appoint the man he had chosen for the position.

I remember the day that Mr. Silas Hume brought Mr. Brunt, the new mate, down to the *Prester John*. Mr. Brunt was the biggest man I had ever seen ; not big as my father was big, which was a bigness that was what I might call a protective bigness but fiercely big so that men were inclined to sneak by him, a little fearful of his strength. I never saw anyone who was honest and sincere, no matter how small and weak they were, cringe in the presence of my father.

Old Mr. Silas Hume hobbled aboard with Mr. Brunt at his side, reminding me, now that I recall the scene, of a huge collier in the company of a worn-out hulk that was on the point of sinking. My father was on the deck, and Mr. Hume introduced the mate.

" Mr. Brunt knows how to deal with men," giggled Mr. Hume. " He doesn't pet and coddle them."

Mr. Brunt showed his big yellow teeth ; my father did not speak. He was seldom in a hurry to speak.

Mr. Hume went on speaking. ' I think, Captain Whittemore," he said, " that your men believe the *Prester John* is plugging round the world to give them food and drink."

" I don't think so," said my father quietly. " They're good men, every one of them."

Mr. Hume laughed in a queer way, then he turned to Mr. Brunt. " What is your opinion of sailors, Mr. Brunt ? " he asked.

" All scoundrels," growled Mr. Brunt. " Every mother's son of 'em ! "

My father looked at Mr. Brunt without speaking, looked at him with his quiet, grey eyes ; then he turned and walked

away, leaving Mr. Silas Hume and Mr. Brunt standing together on the deck. The cook told me once that the best seats in heaven were given to good masters, and the first row of all were given to good sailing masters, "for," said the cook, "the Almighty knows that He made a contrary thing when He made the great waters, so the reward is big for those who can keep their temper with foolish men." There are a thousand things I could tell of my father's good temper, but they do not come into this story.

Later that day there was another discussion between my father and Mr. Silas Hume, but when the *Prester John* pulled out of the Mersey, Mr. Brunt was on the deck giving orders.

It was very strange how the presence of Mr. Brunt affected the ship. It was not that he bullied the men—my father would not allow that—it was, as the cook said, "the belief that he would bully them if he got a chance." He had a great contempt for sailors and all people who did humble tasks, and he could let his contempt be seen by those who were not in the least observant, so that men like Gobby Brown and Ned Spillane crept past him on the deck as if afraid that he might pounce on them. It was very puzzling, and I know that it upset my father a lot. Mr. Colvin was altogether different. He was a close friend of my father and my mother and of all the men; Mr. Brunt made no friends, not a one. Even little Isobel would cry when she saw him coming towards her, and she would run to one of the men, unless The Boy from Bangor was near, when she would always run to him. The Boy from Bangor was her special friend.

It is about time that I told of The Boy from Bangor, who talked with the sea, and saw things that others could not see. People said that he was half-witted, but then, as the cook said, "the only measure for weighing wits is the hand of the Almighty, so what do we know?" But I do know that The Boy could not do things that others could do. He could not remember anything—his name, where he came from, the name of the ship or the name of any one of the ports we visited. I must correct myself right here. There was one thing he memorized, that was a little verse that the cook wrote about my sister, and which The Boy from Bangor was always singing to her because it pleased her very much. The verse ran:

Golden beads and poppy seeds
And lots of sugared tea,
With honey cake and mermaids bake
Down in the China Sea.
Oh, when my treasure ship come in
I'll buy them all for thee.

It is strange how he remembered this verse when so many other things slipped from his head like foam from a scupper, but so it was. Little Isobel loved to hear him say it over and over again, and he never forgot one word of it.

¶

THE Boy was about sixteen years of age, and he was the son of a sailor who died upon the *Prester John*. The sailor told my father about The Boy when he was dying, and my father promised him that he would find him the next time he went to Liverpool, which he did, making a special trip to Bangor to bring him to the ship.

The Boy had a queer gift which made him a great favourite with all the men on the *Prester John*. He could see things on the water that they could not see, queer ships that he would describe to them minutely. They were never tired of listening to him. He could not see these ships often, but when he did see them the men would gather round him and listen open-mouthed to his descriptions. He could see them better on moonlit nights when the sea was quiet, and a lot of the men, including the cook, thought that the vessels The Boy saw were ships that had been sunk before their time, so to speak, and that their ghosts came up at odd moments to sail around. It was a curious thing. My father gave no opinion on the matter, but I have observed him listening, without seeming to listen, when The Boy was describing a galleon or an old-time caravel that he alone could see. And I have thought that my father looked puzzled when The Boy spoke of rigging, and things that were not of his time and which he had never seen.

The *Prester John* was sixteen days out from Liverpool on her way to Capetown, when there happened a matter that is the real foundation of this story. The Boy one late afternoon, thought that he saw a ship straight ahead of us when no one else could see anything but cold, grey water. The sailors that were near him gathered

round to hear his description of her, and, while The Boy was pointing and talking excitedly, the mate, Mr. Brunt, stepped up and listened.

" What is wrong with him ? " asked the mate.

" It's a ship that he sees," said Gobby Brown. " Not a real ship, sir. He sees old ships that have been sunk scores of years ago. It's one of 'em he sees now."

Mr Brunt scowled. He got close up to The Boy and touched his shoulder. " What do you see ? "

The Boy was so interested in the ship that he did not know who put the question. He started to talk about the ship, describing her carefully as he always did. " She's a big, high-pooped ship with three masts," he said. " There's gun batteries on two decks, and she's got a big lion and unicorn in gold on her stern."

" And the Nabob of Bunkalore is pacing the deck ? " sneered Mr. Brunt.

" No," said The Boy, " but there are sailors running round with their hair in plaits and——"

The Boy looked up then and saw Mr. Brunt's face. It wasn't a very pretty face just at that moment. The mate looked as if he wanted to hurt someone, and The Boy thought he would postpone any further description of the ship and get away. But Mr. Brunt gripped The Boy's arm and held him tight.

" What do you mean by all this rot ? " asked Mr. Brunt.

" It's a ship, sir," stammered The Boy.

" Is it there now ? " asked Mr. Brunt, pinching The Boy's arm.

The Boy looked at the sea. " No, sir," he cried ; " it's gone now ! "

The mate grinned. " There's only one way to cure a liar," he said, " and that is to hurt him whenever he lies. It's been in practice for quite a number of years, and it seems to have answered."

When Mr. Brunt said that he slipped off a big belt that he was wearing and he started to flog The Boy, using the buckle end of the belt so that The Boy suffered dreadfully. The men were so afraid of Mr. Brunt that they stood around open-mouthed ; but my little sister, Isobel, ran screaming to my father, and managed to make him understand that Mr. Brunt was ill-using The Boy.

My father rushed on deck and cried out to Mr. Brunt, but Mr. Brunt's temper was up and he did not hear. My father thrust himself between the mate and The Boy, and he received in the face a cut from the belt which was intended for The Boy. Mr. Brunt was in such a violent passion that he did not know that he had struck my father, and he tried to repeat the blow, cursing dreadfully at the time.

I have mentioned in this story that my father was a very strong man, and that I had only seen him put forth his strength on one occasion. It is of this occasion I am writing now. Mr. Brunt was the biggest man I ever saw in my life, and I have heard Lowery Finch, Ned Spillane, and many other sailors on the *Prester John* say that they had never seen a bigger or a stronger man, but on that evening he was a baby in the hands of my father. Just a kicking baby, that's all.

My father picked up Mr. Brunt in his great arms, picked him up bodily from the deck, with Mr. Brunt kicking like a madman and swearing awful. Up on to my father's shoulder he went, his big legs flailing the air ; the men, amazed at what they saw, stumbled out of the way, and my father, walking easily, carried the mate below and locked him in his cabin !

¶

IT was late that evening—possibly five hours after the happening on the deck—that the *Prester John* ran into rough weather. It increased through the night, and in the morning it was a full-sized gale. I don't know what my father's intentions were regarding Mr. Brunt, but the gale made it necessary for the mate to return to duty.

It was very rough throughout the day, and the *Prester John* groaned as the big waves pounded her. I can recall the days as if it were yesterday. Mr. Brunt's treatment of The Boy was so unusual a happening upon the *Prester John* that it depressed the men, and this depression was not lessened by the storm. It was curious how the flogging of The Boy affected my little sister. All through the night she was nervous and could not sleep, and when she did get to sleep she would cry out in alarm. And the belief in her mind that Mr. Brunt would kill The Boy persisted during the day. Three times my mother had to send for The Boy before she would believe that he was all right, and the poor fellow had to sit down and say the poem of " Golden

Beads and Poppy Seeds" over and over again before she would leave him go. He was very good-tempered, and he laughed at her fears although he had many bruises on his face and arms where Mr. Brunt had struck him. My mother cried when she dressed the bruises, but The Boy pretended that they did not hurt at all. He wanted to tell mother about my father's great strength, and that made her cry more because of his desire to take her thoughts from his own injuries. I think the cook was right when he said the hand of the Almighty is the only measure to weigh wits.

The evening closed in early with much thunder and lightning. A rather terrifying evening. Both my father and Mr. Brunt were on deck, and the *Prester John* was rolling dreadfully.

It was just about six bells when a horrible thing happened. A bolt of lightning hit the mainmast, splintering about twenty feet of it, and the noise made everyone think that something awful had happened. I don't know how it came about that my little sister got away from my mother at that moment, but those things occur when a mother is distracted by other happenings. Little Isobel thought that the crash was brought about by Mr. Brunt's attempt to murder The Boy, and her belief that she had saved him on the previous evening prompted her to run to his rescue while my mother was trying to learn what had happened to the ship. At least that was how we tried to reason the matter out in the dreadful days that followed.

Only one man actually saw what happened That was Ned Spillane. He came stumbling. and clawing along the deck, screaming to my father as he came.

My father gripped him and dragged him to his feet as Ned's legs gave way beneath him, then as he drew Spillane's white face up into the light of a lamp, he shouted: "What is it? What has happened?"

"The baby!" gasped Ned Spillane. "The baby! She's overboard, and The Boy has gone after her!"

I saw my father's face as the words hit him. Before Ned Spillane cried out the news it was red and full of life; then as his brain took in the details all the ruddiness went out of it; it became lead-coloured and old. Very, very old.

I cannot write in detail all that followed. I know that it was so appalling that I could not think. I can remember the wet face of Ned Spillane thrust into patches of thin lamplight, his queer long lips repeating endlessly the horrible story. I know that I wished he would die because I thought if he could be stopped from telling the story we would wake up and find that it was untrue. "I saw a big wave sneak in an' catch her," poor old Ned would say again and again. "Catch her an' drag her right off. The Boy was hanging on with both hands, but when he saw her going he let out a yell and dashed after her. There came a big roll, and I was knocked off my feet, an' when I got up again I could see nothing!"

My mother could not believe it. She ran round the ship calling to Isobel, while the men clung to the slippery decks and defied the big black waves that came aboard. It was a wonder that there were not more lost that night, because it was a wild, mad night, and the men took chances for their love of Isobel. The cook was not a real sailorman, and twice that night I saw my father grip him and hold him when a snaky comber came up over the rail of the *Prester John* and clutched at the cook. The cook was crying—crying loudly. He was a poet, was the cook; a sweet man.

Once that night I staggered against Mr. Brunt. He pushed me off and I looked up into his face. He was scowling, but there was no trace on his face of the great grief that I saw upon the faces of the other men.

Morning came, and I saw my father trying to comfort my mother. A splendid, strong man was my father, splendid in the manner in which he stood up against the grief that was gnawing the inside out of him. His face was still lead-coloured; it looked as if it was bruised all over.

"Is there any hope?" sobbed my mother. "Tell me, John?"

"There is always hope," said my father. "There is always a watching Providence."

He turned to me when he said that, and told me to tell Ned Spillane to bring a few of the older men below for a minute. I think there were six of them—Ned Spillane, Lowery Finch, Dick Colby, who was known as "Gloucester Dick," Gobby Brown, the cook, and Tom Henderson. And when they were all there, wet and whitefaced, my father offered up a prayer. I cannot find it in the Book of Prayer, so

he must have made it up at the moment. I think I can remember it all:

> Oh, God of the Great Waters, we men of the *Prester John* pray to Thee. Help us to see Thy wisdom in all things, even in those things that make us weak as babies. Who are we to understand Thy ways? Help us, help the mother who suckled her, and if it is Thy will, take our little one to Thy bosom and with her the poor boy who loved her.

I remember how my father repeated the last few words that related to The Boy from Bangor: "And with her the poor boy who loved her," he said softly. "Amen," said Ned Spillane.

I heard my father telling my mother that from his calculations the *Prester John* was then very close to the spot where we had lost Little Isobel and The Boy, he having circled as well as he was able through the night. I asked Ned Spillane if it was so, but he said nothing, so I thought that my father had made the statement to ease the great grief that was upon my mother. But all hands were on the slippery deck, watching with tired eyes the grey, lonely waters. The sea looked awfully cold and treacherous that morning. I can never remember a sea that looked so vicious and bad. Those big waves that slapped the sides of the *Prester John* and came sneaking inboard seemed to laugh at us.

About seven bells that forenoon, Dick Colby, who was clinging to the rigging, sighted something dead ahead, and there was a terrible flurry on the ship, everyone hoping for a miracle to happen, although my father tried to restrain the wild hope that came to my mother's heart when Colby cried out.

My father was a splendid seaman. In that heaving sea he managed to launch a boat, and his great strength and judgment saved it from being battered against the ship's sides when it reached the water. I think the putting out of strength in the rescue or the protection of the weak is one of the most glorious things in the world.

The *Prester John* fell away, and we watched the little boat from the deck. My mother would not stay below. Ned Spillane, Dick Colby, Gobby Brown and Matthew Craddock had gone with my father in the boat, and the poor cook thought in their absence that he was the special guardian of my mother. She was wet to the waist, and the cook and Wee Billy Fairclough, who came from Bootle, were clinging to her as the old ship wallowed. Mr. Brunt, who was in charge of the ship, stood apart, silent and scowling. I think that the story which was told to me later was first whispered that morning. I remember that I saw Gobby Brown and two other men talking together and nodding their heads towards Mr. Brunt.

There were queer patches of sunlight on the grey waves, just blobs of sunlight that had dropped through holes in the clouds, and now and then when the little boat got into one of these patches we could see her distinctly. Lowery Finch was in the rigging, and he shouted down news to us.

"They're close!" he yelled.

Then later: "See it quite plainly. Captain Whittemore is standing up."

Then: "They're 'longside. Captain Whittemore is leaning over. They've got it! They——"

Lowery Finch stopped as if someone had gripped him suddenly by the throat. The cook grabbed my mother by the waist. Wee Billy Fairclough looked up at Lowery Finch and showed his teeth. Lowery Finch was looking down, his face grey and washed with fear.

"They're coming back," he cried, and his words were sort of skeleton words with no body or soul in them. The cook and Wee Billy Fairclough carried my mother below.

Grief, so the cook once told me, can hammer out an hour so that it looks like a century. That day on the *Prester John* was longer than the time between the sailing of the *Golden Hind* and this sweet morning which I am spending in putting down the story of the *Prester John*. Our eyes ached as we watched the sea, our legs were numbed with the cold water, the ship plunged up and down like as if it, too, was a victim of helpless grief.

My father spoke little. I don't remember him in conversation with Mr. Brunt, but I saw him exchange a few words with Matthew Craddock, who was a large-hearted, God-fearing man, who had seen much trouble, and who had stood up under it because he had a great faith. I have always thought that the persons who have great faith are all simple souls like Matthew Craddock, and their simplicity is so great that they do not realize that their faith brings to them a great comfort which is denied to others. What I mean to say is

that men like Matthew Craddock were born with faith, and being of simple natures they cannot picture the awful despair of those who were not born with the great possession, and whose nature prevents them from absorbing it later in life.

All that day, the next and the next we beat around, watching the sea, hoping, when the brain of the greatest lubber in the world would tell him that hope was dead. And it was on the second day after the terrible happening that I overheard the story concerning Mr. Brunt, which I mentioned. I listened unintentionally to a conversation between Wee Billy Fairclough and Hinky Dalton, who never spoke because he couldn't talk without swearing. Hinky had been converted in Plymouth, and as he promised the missionary he would not swear, the promise sort of trimmed his conversation down so that "no" and "yes" were about all that he could say without taking a chance.

"Did you hear what he said?" asked Wee Billy.

Hinky thought a moment, then said: "No."

"You didn't?"

"No," answered Hinky.

"Why," said Wee Billy Fairclough, "he said that it wasn't such a great loss, as The Boy was an idiot, and girls were a bit of a nuisance in the world."

"Who heard him?" asked Hinky Dalton, forgetting for the minute his caution regarding the use of words.

"He said it to Pink Teague," answered Billy.

And then Hinky Dalton unloosed all the curses that he had held back from the moment he had made the promise to the missionary. Unloosed the whole lot of them. They streamed through his blue lips—awful, horrible curses—and they were all directed against Mr. Brunt. I have heard a lot of profanity at sea, because sailors are given to expressing themselves in a colourful manner, but I have never heard anyone swear like Hinky Dalton. He was extraordinary. He used whole strings of curse words that started with the same letter of the alphabet, fifteen or twenty of them, and never the same one used twice. And when he finished up one string he would start with another letter, and run through that in the same way.

Later that day I spoke to the cook about Hinky's swearing, and the promise he had made to the missionary, and the cook said that if the missionary was about he would probably close his ears to what Hinky said The cook said that missionaries to sailors were wise men, and they knew that if you tried to pour two gallons of soup into a gallon can that something would happen.

The morning of the fourth day broke bright and clear. The waves went down, and the deck of the *Prester John* was white and dry. And on the deck my father held a little prayer service in which he repeated the prayer that he had said in the cabin. And when he said the prayer it seemed that a lot of grief was lifted from my mind, and I think it was lifted from the minds of the others. It was sunny and there were sweet winds, and the *Prester John* was riding on an even keel.

My mother, who was kneeling, got to her feet and looked out over the quiet ocean; then she walked to my father, and put her two hands on his broad shoulders.

"John!" she whispered, "let us go on!"

My father stooped and kissed her, and a half-hour later the *Prester John* was logging ten knots on her way to Capetown.

¶

WE made the Cape of Good Hope fifty-nine days out of Liverpool, which is not a good passage, as any sailorman can tell you. We fell in with contrary winds after the loss of Little Isobel and The Boy from Bangor, and we were very glad to see the white table-cloth of mist settling down upon Table Mountain. At least, the men were glad. I know that my mother had spoken to Little Isobel of the "table-cloth" when we were leaving the Mersey, so it must have hurt my mother dreadfully to see it as the *Prester John* crept into port.

And at Capetown Mr. Brunt left the ship. I do not know what passed between him and my father, but on the morning after our arrival, which was, by the way, a Sunday, Mr. Brunt gathered up his things and stepped ashore.

It was a curious, quiet Sunday. The *Prester John* was lying alongside the wharf, and, it being the Sabbath Day, there was no one around. My father was on deck, but he barely nodded when Mr. Brunt went down the plank. On the wharf were Hinky Dalton, Lowery Finch and Matthew Craddock, while a number of the other men

were about the ship, all strangely silent, and watching the departure of Mr. Brunt.

Mr. Brunt paused to light his pipe, and Lowery Finch walked up to him. Lowery looked very small alongside Mr. Brunt, who never seemed so large as he did at that moment. I was standing by the rail, and I could hear distinctly all that passed.

Lowery Finch asked a question, asked it very politely. "Have you left the ship, sir?" he said.

Mr. Brunt stood with the match in his hand, and looked down at the sailor. For a moment he did not speak; then he growled: "Yes, but what has it got to do with you, you rat?"

"It's this," said Lowery Finch, straightening his shoulders. "On the night we lost The Boy and Little Isobel, you were overheard to say that it was a good job, because The Boy was an idiot and that girls were a nuisance anyhow. We sailors couldn't ask you if you had said it while you were first officer of the *Prester John*, but now that you've left the ship we'd like to know if it is true?"

Mr. Brunt let out an oath, and told Lowery Finch to betake himself to a place that was quite a way from Capetown, but Lowery kept cool. Mr. Brunt stooped to pick up his dunnage bag, then Finch leaned forward and touched his sleeve.

"We'd like to know," he said softly. "Did you say it?"

"I did say it!" roared Mr. Brunt, and as he spoke he thrust out his big right fist so that Lowery Finch had to move very swiftly to escape the blow.

Now the cook had come out of his caboose at the first sign of trouble, and he was now leaning over the rail making peculiar noises with his mouth, like as if he was grooming a horse. I mention the cook because he wrote a set of verses describing the fight that followed, and one of those verses tells what happened when Mr. Brunt opened the attack. I think the cook described it well, considering that he had to hunt around in his head for words that would rhyme with other words. His description goes:

Brave Lowery Finch,
He didn't flinch,
  But ducked and slipped in under.
He jabbed at Brunt,
Who gave a grunt
  That sounded much like thunder.

My father loved those verses the cook wrote about the big fight. He asked the cook to make a copy of them for him, and I have never seen him laugh so heartily as when he read them over.

My father did not watch the fight. He was on deck when Lowery Finch just spoke to Mr. Brunt, and I think he saw Mr. Brunt's first attempt to hit Lowery, but he went below then, and did not return till it was all over.

There are men who are specially gifted and who report fights, giving in detail the blows that are struck and the effect they have upon the fighters. I think of these men as I write, and I wish I could describe in the same manner the battle on the wharf at Capetown. But I cannot. Of course I saw very clearly the first blow that was aimed at Lowery, and I saw with much surprise what Lowery did when, according to the cook's verse, he "slipped in under and jabbed at Brunt." The cook means that Lowery slipped in under Mr. Brunt's big arm, and he must have certainly jabbed Mr. Brunt very hard. Very, very hard, I should say.

¶

AFTER that the fight became a blur to me—that is, things happened with such swiftness that I couldn't tell whether Lowery Finch hit Mr. Brunt with his right fist or his left, or whether he used jabs, hooks, upper-cuts, or round-arm swings. Neither could I tell the kind of blows that Mr. Brunt used. I have a memory-picture of Lowery Finch weaving in and out like a supple snake, never still for an instant, hopping, leaping, dancing backward, and then darting in like a bantam rooster between the big arms of Mr. Brunt, ducking with such cleverness that the mate's fists seemed to miss him by a hair's-breadth each time. A great fight, I believe. A splendid, glorious fight.

The noises made by the cook were funny. Now and then, when Lowery Finch would leap in like a wild stag and beat a tattoo on Mr. Brunt's body, the hissing sound made by the cook was nearly frightening A wonderful fighter was Finch. Some of the men said afterwards that he was once a champion fighter in London, but I do not know if this was so. But he must have been a great fighter to stand up against Mr. Brunt, who was the biggest and the strongest man I have ever seen.

There were no rests in that fight. None at all. It went full speed from start to finish, as the cook described it when he wrote:

It could not last,
Fists falling fast,
  Like rain in monsoon weather,
With Finch, brave boy,
To our great joy,
  Giving B. just hell for leather!

My eyes ached watching Lowery Finch. Mr. Brunt raced him round the wharf, hitting madly at the spots where Finch was the instant before Mr. Brunt's fists got there. Hop, dart, duck; duck, dart, hop, went Lowery. In with a leap, back with a rebound that was amazing. Ducking, pirouetting, leaping in the air, puzzling Mr. Brunt, who would, whenever he pulled up for an instant to find out where Lowery was, receive an awful wallop from a fist that came from an unexpected direction, and which was mostly followed by another fist travelling close behind.

All the men on the wharf and most of the men on the ship were silent during the fight. It was very queer, their silence. Only the cook made noises, but the cook being a poet he could not be blamed.

The end came when Mr. Brunt tried to pen Lowery Finch in a corner, and it was then that Lowery did something which the men talked of for days afterwards. Mr. Brunt had him in a corner, and I could see a grin of delight on the battered face of the mate, when Finch did an astonishing thing. He suddenly turned his back to Mr. Brunt, took a quick spring at the nearly perpendicular side of the shed that hemmed him in, ran up the wall of it, and, from the force with which he flung himself from the wall *he leaped backward*, his feet clearing the head of Mr. Brunt, who had just stooped to deliver a blow at the back of Lowery's head. It was a great trick, and only a sailor could do it.

Mr. Brunt, astonished at Lowery leaping over his head, turned in a queer, stumbling manner, and Finch sprang at him. For my part I saw nothing but a movement of Lowery Finch's two arms, then Mr. Brunt dropped full length on the wharf and lay without moving.

The cook described the finish like this:

A left and right
Shot up like light
  From out the morning ocean;
On Brunt's big chin
They scored a win,
  He dropped and gave no motion.

Lowery Finch and the men on the wharf climbed back on the *Prester John*, and went about their work. It was all very quiet. Mr. Brunt lay where he had fallen for about five minutes, then he gathered himself up, picked up his belongings, and staggered away towards the town. I have never seen him since that day. We shipped at Capetown a young man named Merritt to take the place of Mr. Brunt, and the *Prester John* became once more a peaceful ship, Mr. Merritt being a very nice man and a good navigator. My father liked him very much.

It is hard for a ship's company to forget a tragedy, because there is so little communication with persons outside and very few happenings to distract their minds. It was so on the *Prester John*. The men talked a lot of The Boy and Little Isobel, and, of course, my mother and my father could not forget. It was very hard on my mother. Very, very hard. I think she must have suffered dreadfully in the first year that passed after the happening. Once I found her in the cabin, her head on one side, listening to a little tapping sound that came from the deck. There was a look of great joy on my mother's face, a beautiful joy that seemed to light up her features, and I stood and watched her, wondering what had happened. She did not see me, as the cabin was not well lighted.

The tapping went on for quite a few minutes—a little, soft tapping like fairy feet, possibly made by the loose ends of a rope that a sailor was twisting, then it stopped suddenly and the light fled from my mother's face. I crept quietly away. The little soft tapping from the deck had reminded my mother of the soft little sounds made by Isobel's feet as she skipped there on sunny afternoons. I have often thought how hard it is for women who have lost children. Every little sound reminds them of the lost ones.

We went to many ports during that year, but they lacked a little of the colour and joy that they seemed to have when Isobel was with us. Still, in all, they were splendid though. We went into the Mediterranean that year, to Marseilles, where the big golden virgin of *Notre Dame de la Garde* stands up on its great hill to see that sailormen do not come to harm. The cook, who was a Catholic, asked my father if he could take me up to see the offerings which sailors place in the church;

and my father, who was, like all the Whittermores, a Congregationalist, said he could.

It was rather wonderful in that church. There were all sorts of childish offerings, little wooden ships and painted boats and tablets in the wall that were presented by sailors, who thought that they had received special protection from wind and waves by the Virgin who watches the Mediterranean. I thought it was rather strange because I was not brought up in that faith; then I thought it very comforting to those who had made the gifts. "Gratitude," as the cook once said, "is a nice warm bath for the soul of the person who is grateful," so whether the Virgin did or did not help them out of trouble they did good to themselves by making a gift.

Coming back to the *Vieux Port* the cook asked me if I thought my father would object to a little offering to *Notre Dame de la Garde* on behalf of Little Isobel and The Boy from Bangor, and I said I did not know.

"Ask your mother," said the cook. "I am afraid your father would not like it. But there is no religion about *Notre Dame de la Garde*. She is the guardian of all the sailors, and whether they are Congregational, or Baptist or Roman Catholic, it does not matter."

I told my mother what the cook had said, and she cried because she knew the poor cook did not mean any harm. "Tell him I have no objections," she sobbed, "and I am sure your father would have none. No, no, he surely wouldn't! Tell the cook he can do what he likes."

I do not know what the cook put in the church amongst the little ships and the tablets. I couldn't guess. I delivered him my mother's message, and he said no more about it.

¶

WE went to many other ports in the Mediterranean. To Genoa, where there is, so I think, the most wonderful lighthouse in the world, because it has guided sailormen to port for seven hundred years. Mr. Merritt and I climbed up its three hundred and thirty-five steps to the great light that flashes every ten seconds. It seemed like a shrine. To Venice, where we came on a spring morning so beautiful that we spoke in whispers. Ah, the sea is wonderful, and so are the little ports that beckon ships.

It was on the way back to Liverpool that my father had an idea. I think it was the greatest idea that ever came to any man, but then I am not a fair judge because I benefited from my father's idea. He thought it would be a splendid thing for my mother to adopt the daughter of Mr. Colvin, the mate of the *Prester John*, that we buried in the Tuscarora Trough, and this my mother did the moment we got home.

Mr. Colvin's daughter came aboard one spring morning, the harbour breezes hauling like sailormen at her golden curls, and the cook called her "Light o' the Dawn." She is the same little "Light o' the Dawn" that sits sewing on the little shirt that I'll wager no human being will ever be able to get inside of, the same that urged me to write this little history of the *Prester John*, and she is as fair and as wonderful to-day as she was on that spring morning when she first came aboard. The ship was her home from the first moment. The men knew her; she was "Mr. Colvin's little Marjorie," and she had all the sweetness and charm of her daddy that lay in the deep, deep grave that God had dug for sailormen.

Sometimes I sit and wonder over things, and I become convinced that everything is planned ages and ages before it happened. The dark days and the good days; for, as the cook said once, "a little of the best threads in every rug are turned to the floor." And I think that the whole business of which I write was a pre-ordained thing in which even Mr. Brunt was born to play his part.

It was on the first voyage we made with Marjorie Colvin aboard that my mother spoke of the desire she had to pass over the spot where Little Isobel and The Boy from Bangor were lost. I think that she had spoken of this desire before, but only to my father. I am sure she did, because one evening I heard my father and my mother talking, and there was that in their talk which made me feel that it was a matter that had been much discussed previously. We were making for Durban, so I knew to what my mother referred when she said to my father: "You will let me know, John, when we come to the exact place?"

"Priscilla," said my father, looking at her with gentle eyes, "will it not be better to say nothing?"

"No," said my mother, speaking very quietly, "I cannot explain it to you, John, but I have a great longing to be near there."

" It will distress you," said my father.

" No, it will not distress me," said my mother. " I know it will not. There is something—— Oh, John, please tell me ! "

" I will, Priscilla," said my father.

It was on a June morning that we came to the spot which, as near as my father could figure out, was the situation of the *Prester John* on the night when Little Isobel and The Boy from Bangor were swept overboard. Of course, as every reader of the tale knows, there was nothing to mark it; but—and this was curious—it seemed to me that it was the exact spot. There came to me a feeling that it was really and truly the place, and just as that feeling came to me the little wind that was carrying the *Prester John* slipped away, and we were left in a wonderful calm—a calm that was so great that it seemed like a *light*, a great white light that went into our souls.

I think all sailors should have great thoughts, and I am sure that many, many of them, especially those who have spent much of their lives on sailing ships, do have great and wonderful thoughts which they cannot express in words. It is hard to put thoughts into words, as I have found out in writing this little tale.

All around us as the *Prester John* rose and fell to the little waves there stretched leagues of water, upon which the sunshine was spread like a great dazzling cloth. The sky was very blue, and in the whole of the heavens there was only one round, fat, and beautifully white cloud that looked as if it might be hiding some angel that had been told to watch what we might do.

There were on the deck of the ship, standing silent, the men who had gone in the boat with my father on the morning after the night of great sorrow, Ned Spillane, Dick Golby, Gobby Brown and Matthew Craddock. They looked just the same as they did on that morning—quiet, simple sailormen of the old school. My father walked up to Matthew Craddock—Matthew of the great faith—spoke to him in a whisper, and then Matthew gathered up all the men, and there on the deck in the soft sunshine, with the big ocean all around us, my father offered up the little simple prayer that he had made on the night we had lost my sister and The Boy. My mother and Marjorie Colvin were there in the little circle; their eyes were wet, and I remember how I thought it sweet of Marjorie to be so sorry for others who were in trouble. After the prayer she kissed my mother and took her below, but the men stayed around the deck, watching the sea, very quiet and not inclined to talk.

We were there without wind till later in the afternoon; then a breeze came up, the *Prester John* shook herself, and we went on our way. It was a very curious happening though, very curious.

Marjorie Colvin brought me into a new world. I had passed through that time in a boy's life when he is taken about by older persons, and has not yet reached the time when he can act as a guide to anyone else. Marjorie led me out of that awkward stage by asking me questions. Silly questions, I thought them; but they pleased me, because I could answer them. I think all women are taught to ask men questions that are so easy that the biggest fool could answer them. Marjorie, who was a sailor's daughter, and who must have heard a lot about ships from the time she was in the cradle, asked me all sorts of questions about things that a child ought to know. And I answered them with delight, jeering a little at her because of her ignorance of nautical matters.

¶

" BUT I am only a girl, Big Seahorse," she said one morning when I had explained to her how we calculated the speed of the *Prester John*.

" My name is not Big Seahorse," I said.

" Isn't it ? " she asked. " But it is a nice name. Don't you think so ? "

" I do not," I growled.

" The Big Seahorse is pretending to be annoyed," she said, addressing the blue water of the Indian Ocean through which we were butting up towards Mombasa. " He doesn't like his name, which is such a pretty name."

And then I, simple fool under the flattery of her tongue, told her of the name that the cook had given her on the morning she came aboard the *Prester John*.

" Light o' the Dawn ! " she said softly. " Oh, Seahorse, isn't that a sweet name ! Why, if I had known that you would call me by a name as sweet as that I would have picked a much nicer name for you."

" I like it." I stammered. " I think Big Seahorse is a splendid name."

They were wonderful days, those. There are stretches of water up the coast of Africa that come to me in my dreams.

Between Zanzibar and Kismayu there is a place in which the water looks like plaited rainbows, all loosely drawn so that their colours are quite distinct. I have never seen water like it. It was there that I first touched the hand of Light o' the Dawn, touched it and held it during part of a splendid sleepy afternoon when the *Prester John* rolled carelessly along before a fat, workmanlike breeze that seemed to know the old ship and took no liberties with her.

And there were other places just as wonderful. A moonlit night off Cape Gardafui when the sea was coated with cream, with great lights down in the water so that the flash of the lights showed when the *Prester John* drove her forefoot into the cream layer! I think only lovers should write of the sea. Lovers so drunk with its beauty that they would see, as I saw in those days, the soft glories of the great waters.

We went to many ports on that trip. To Aden, where the throb of the tom-toms came from the Arab town, and where there is but one tree whose leaves people who visit the place take away as souvenirs. I gave a leaf to Marjorie. "There is but one tree and one Light o' the Dawn," I stammered, and she pretended to think that I had said something that was very smart. Women are wonderful.

To Bombay and Singapore. And at Singapore we found in a street near the Rochore Market Mrs. Budd, the fat and competent Mrs. Budd who had officiated at the birth of Little Isobel in the Karimata Strait. She was married to a big Scotch engineer, and her little house was very comfortable when my mother and Marjorie and I called to see her. She had the set of verses that the cook had written about her, and she asked about the cook and sighed softly when my mother told her that he was still aboard the *Prester John*. I think there must be something in that story the French captain told me about troubadours.

When I returned to the ship I told the cook that Mrs. Budd had inquired about him, and he stood silent for a moment gazing into a great pot of stew that he was cooking. I thought it a good time to ask him a question that was in my mind.

"Do you think," I asked, "do you really think I could write poetry?"

The cook turned and looked at me with his head on one side—looked at me for a few moments before he answered: "I do not," he said quietly.

"Why?" I asked. "Why can't I write it?"

"Because you have asked me if I thought you could," snapped the cook. "I never asked anyone that question; no poet does." He leaned towards me, and spoke impressively. "The real poet knows he can write poetry from the day of his birth," he said solemnly. "He knows it as surely as he knows that he will grow hair."

I was silent, and after a little while the cook spoke again. "There is a lot in reading other fellows' poetry to girls," he said. "I have a book that I will lend you. I'll get it now."

The cook loaned me a book of verses by a poet named Tennyson, but I couldn't read them to Light o' the Dawn because I did not understand what they were all about. That is why the cook's poetry was liked by my father, and by Mrs. Budd and by all the men aboard the *Prester John*.

This Mr. Tennyson could not have written verses that would have kept Mrs. Budd on the ship when the poor lady was sea-sick; and, although the cook told me that Mr. Tennyson was a great poet, I do not believe he could have written an account of the great fight between Lowery Finch and Mr. Brunt in a way that would have made my father laugh.

The cook asked me once if I did read any of the verses to Marjorie, and I answered truthfully. "No," I said. "I do not understand them."

"Well," he said, "they are a little obscure for persons who are not themselves poets."

We weaved in and out across the world, rolling home with the smell of India and China creeping up through the hatch covers. My mother seemed more contented now because Marjorie was much like a daughter to her, but that old longing to see the place where Little Isobel had been lost to us was very strong in her. Very, very strong. It was strange in a way, and I know it puzzled my father greatly, and that he tried in his kind way to kill the desire because he thought it would do my mother harm.

Once on our way from Bombay to Liverpool my father went a long way out of his track to reach the spot, although he did not tell my mother that he went out of his track. It was Mr. Merritt, the mate, who told me.

We reached there in the night, a very dark and stormy night that brought back thoughts of that other night six years before when Ned Spillane had shouted the awful news to my father. I know that it brought back all the agony to my mother. She was very, very sad, and yet she was pleased that my father had brought the *Prester John* to the spot.

"I cannot help it," she sobbed. "I've got a strange desire to come here, and—although it hurts me I must come. Oh, John, I must come!"

"Yes," said my father soothingly, "I understand."

But I know that my father did not understand why my mother wished to visit again and again the spot where Little Isobel and The Boy had been lost. Men seldom understand women in matters like that. Women, being gentler and more sensitive, have little longings and desires that men do not know of, and which they often think foolish, although my father did not think my mother foolish. I am sure he did not. But he was puzzled—greatly puzzled.

My mother's thoughts were always of Little Isobel. I remember one morning how Lowery Finch was humming the verse that The Boy used to sing to my sister—the verse that spoke of:

> Golden beads and poppy seeds,
> And lots of sugared tea.

"Oh, Finch, please don't!" cries my mother, and poor Lowery Finch, a little older now than when he fought the great battle with Mr. Brunt on the wharf at Capetown, didn't stop apologizing for ten minutes. Lowery Finch liked all the cook's verses except the one that told of the big fight, although my father thought the poetry about the fight was the best the cook had ever written.

Mr. Silas Hume, the part owner of the *Prester John*, died and left his interest to a nephew, a rather smart young clubman who did not bother about the ship and seldom saw my father. His indifference allowed my father a free hand, and the *Prester John* continued to be a nice old happy ship that rolled around the world, poking her nose into strange ports and carrying off strange cargoes. I learned navigation under my father in those years, but I had not his gift for the game. He was a great sailor. As the cook wrote once:

> There's ninety roads to Singapore,
> All known to Captain Whittemore,
> And if they find there's ninety-one,
> I bet he's first to make the run.

Now, curiously, I have always thought the *Prester John* as well as all other sailing ships that I have ever seen look as if they are a little afraid of the sea. I am sure that they are. I have watched them in all weathers and in all places, and I know of what I am speaking. I have watched them tied up to wharves against which they huddled when sailormen wished to drive them out on the big waters, and I have found them show their relief in queer little groans of delight when they swung into port after a rough passage.

Now my father knew the *Prester John* so well that Ned Spillane said once that if an extra barnacle hooked itself on to the bottom of the old ship my father would know about it. I think Ned Spillane was right. My father seemed to have ears in the soles of his shoes, and the deck planks of the *Prester John* whispered things to him that were not heard by the other men because they did not love the ship with the great love that he had for it.

If this comradeship between my father and his ship were not so, I cannot explain the extraordinary knowledge he had of the happening I am going to relate.

## ¶

IT was in the month of April—the twenty-second, I think—that we cleared Durban, and set out for Liverpool, with a fine breeze shoving us along at a great rate. I was very, very happy because Light o' the Dawn had promised to be my wife, and I think that my father and my mother were happy because they loved Marjorie greatly. Matthew Craddock and the cook shook my hand, and Finch, Dick Colby, and a few more of the old hands who knew me when I was very small, wished me all sorts of good luck. I don't believe there was ever a ship like my father's ship. I have never seen one, and I have sailed on many. They tell me that efficiency and system and all these things that make the profits larger are splendid inventions, but they will never recompense me for the old feelings of confidence and comradeship that existed on a ship like the *Prester John*.

But I must go back to the matter of the voyage from Durban to Liverpool when

the *Prester John* spoke to my father. Yes, spoke to him. I have told of this to many captains who have tried to explain it by saying that my father, without knowing it, absorbed many little things into his mind, and the sum of all these little things produced a feeling of near danger which he wrongly thought was communicated to him by the old ship.

"But my father would have known of these little things," I said once to the harbour master at Sydney, Australia, who was a man who knew a lot about the sea.

"No, he would not," he answered. "You see, they would have climbed into his subconscious mind, and we never know what is in the subconscious mind."

I think the harbour master is wrong. I think all who have said to me that it was impossible for my father to receive any communication from the *Prester John* are wrong. My father, through the years, had become part of the ship, but it is only the old school of sailing masters that would understand.

We were nine days out from Durban when my father came down from the deck and spoke to my mother. He looked much distressed, and, for the first time in my life, I thought him a little frightened. My mother thought so, too, for she walked swiftly towards him and clutched his arm.

"What is it, John?" she cried. "What is wrong?"

"Priscilla," said my father, dropping into a seat, "something is going to happen to the ship."

"To the ship?" cried my mother. "How? When?"

"I do not know how, and I do not know when," said my father; "but I know this, and I will say it right now. The *Prester John* will never enter port again!"

My mother could not speak for a moment; then she cried out: "John! John! What is the matter with the ship? Tell me!"

My father ran his big right hand over his face, and said: "I do not know what is wrong with the ship, Priscilla. I cannot see that anything is wrong with her. She's sound and strong, and I cannot guess at what is going to happen."

"But why do you say something is going to happen?" asked my mother.

"Because I know it is," said my father doggedly. "Did you ever hear me talk like this before, Priscilla?"

"Never," said my mother. "It seems—it seems very strange to me."

"Listen!" said my father, and he looked up at my mother and me as he spoke. "I know nothing, but the ship has spoken to me. It has spoken to the soles of my feet as I walked the deck. For hours it has done it, and now I have come to tell you."

My mother sat down before my father, and tried to reason with him. She told him it was ridiculous to get an idea like that into his head; but my father—and I could see this plainly—took no notice of what she said. He sat quietly, and did not speak when my mother told him that he should be ashamed of himself for talking like he did.

After a long while he turned to me. "Do not speak of this to any of the men," he said; and then he got to his feet and went up on deck.

Later that day I saw my father talking very earnestly with Mr. Merritt, and I could see from the look on Mr. Merritt's face that he was very much interested in what my father was saying. The two of them walked around the ship, giving the *Prester John* a quiet survey. They did nothing to startle the men.

For thirteen days we ran before good winds, the old ship behaving splendidly; but my mother and I noticed that the look of anxiety remained with my father. He would sit quiet, his hands clasped together, a far-away look in his eyes, as if trying to find an explanation for the belief that had come to him about the *Prester John*. Outside my mother, Mr. Merritt, Light o' the Dawn and myself, I do not think any other person on the ship knew of the strange belief that had come to my father.

It was on a Monday that Mr. Merritt pointed to a little red cross on the chart, and I knew without asking Mr. Merritt what the cross stood for. It marked the spot where Little Isobel and The Boy from Bangor had been lost.

"With this wind we'll be there to-morrow afternoon," said Mr. Merritt.

It was about noon that Mr. Merritt said that, and that same evening I heard my mother and my father talking. I think my mother was a little annoyed with my father because of his persistence in believing that there was some danger threatening the *Prester John*.

"But I love the ship, Priscilla," said

my father. "I do not think any harm will come to us. It is about my ship that I am worried. I——"

My father stopped because Ned Spillane came through the door without knocking, and I knew from the look on Ned's face that something had happened. "The ship's on fire, sir!" he cried. "The hold is blazing!"

Like the night on which we lost Little Isobel, the night of the fire on the *Prester John* is one about which I can write little. A ship on fire is a terrible thing. It brings more dreadful terrors than anything else in the world. As we fought the fire through the long night, my thoughts were of Light o' the Dawn. The world that lay before me on that afternoon seemed one splendid path of nice blue and purple carpet that was becoming more beautiful with each league the ship covered; then the snaky red tongues that sprang out of the smoke masses in the hold started to eat up the dream years that I had pictured.

¶

NO braver man than my father ever lived. Three times on that night he was carried up unconscious to the deck, once by Mr. Merritt, and twice by Matthew Craddock, who loved my father with a great love. But each time he would recover his senses he would struggle to get back to the fight.

"Let me go!" he would cry, as my mother and Light o' the Dawn tried to hold him. "The ship is mine and I must save her!"

Light o' the Dawn kissed me on that awful night, kissed me on the cheek which was all black and sooty.

"Don't worry, Big Seahorse," she whispered. "Our dream will come true."

"But if the ship burns?" I stammered.

"It will come true just the same," she said. "Nothing can stop a dream like ours."

I think all women are wise, ever so much wiser than men. While I was half crazed through thinking that the burning of the *Prester John* would upset everything, there was Light o' the Dawn quite confident that the burning of a thousand ships could not overturn the future she had built. Possibly on that night she saw herself sewing on the little shirt that she is sewing on now, the shirt that I am willing to swear will never go over the head of any human being that could possibly grow up to be a fair-sized man or woman. I'll wager she did because she was quite calm when things were getting worse with every minute that passed, and she comforted my mother greatly.

It was noon the day following the outbreak that the fire compelled us to leave the *Prester John*. I should say a few minutes after noon. My father, with his hair and beard all scorched, and half-blinded by smoke, took his bearings at noon; then he turned to my mother, his big voice rising above the roar of the flames that filled the hold of the old ship.

"Priscilla," he said, "the Lord has brought us to the spot where our babe was drowned." Then after a little pause he added: "Blessed be the Name of the Lord, and let us thank Him for all His kindness to simple sailormen."

Mr. Merritt stepped up and reported. "The boats are ready, sir," he said.

"Very well," said my father; then, turning to my mother, he said: "Come, Priscilla, we must leave the old ship."

My father was the last man to leave the ship. I went over the rail before him, and when I looked to see if he was coming I could not see him. I was a little afraid, and I climbed back on to the deck. My father was on his knees with his back turned to me the great clouds of smoke sweeping over him as he prayed. While I watched him he stooped and kissed the deck of the *Prester John*, and then I turned and scrambled down the ladder, a little afraid lest he would see that I had been watching him. A strange man was my father. He had all the sweetness and sentiment of a woman, but he did not want anyone to know he had them.

In our boat were my father and my mother, Light o' the Dawn, the cook, Dick Colby, Ned Spillane, Wee Billy Fairclough, four other men and myself. The sea was very calm, and my father and Mr. Merritt, and Matthew Craddock, who was in charge of the third boat, had agreed to do everything to keep together, because my father felt certain that the fear he had concerning the *Prester John* had nothing to do with our safety. He told my mother that we would come to no harm, and he said it in such a quiet, simple way that my mother was much comforted.

My father set a course for Africa, and he spoke cheerfully, although, now and then try as he would to stop himself, he turned

his head and looked back at the *Prester John*, that was now nothing but a great cloud of smoke.

When night came down we could still see her—a great blazing ball of red; then suddenly, while my father was looking ahead, the red glow disappeared, leaving the horizon a great black wall. My father turned and gave a little cry. "She's gone!" he gasped. Then, after a pause, he said: "She was a great ship. Never was there a better one."

It was a dark night, but very calm. We could see the lights of Mr. Merritt's boat and that of Matthew Craddock all the time, and when dawn came they were very close to us. It seems, and this I heard later, that Mr. Merritt told his men after they left the ship that my father had had a foreboding of the fire, but that my father was certain that no harm would come to the ship's company. The men thought that my father's prophecy of an early rescue might only apply to the boat in which he was, so they tried to keep very close to us, and when the dawn came they were so near that my father and Mr. Merritt talked to each other. Mr. Merritt told us what the men thought, and it is a remarkable example of the faith that the men had in my father, that they were cheered considerably when he told them that the feeling of disaster which had been upon him for days had entirely disappeared with the sinking of the *Prester John*, and that he was certain we would be rescued at any moment.

All that day we continued on our course, the boats keeping together, and just as the night was falling Mr. Merritt sighted a steamer that was rapidly overhauling us. She came up very fast, a big black steamer with smoke rolling from her smoke-stack. A well-handled steamer, so my father said at the time.

She came snorting down on us, wheeled like a duchess and stood by. The *Ballarat* from Bristol bound for Capetown they told us as they welcomed us on aboard. A very nice ship with a nice captain and crew. They were very kind to us, as all sailors are to persons who meet with misfortune, and the nine days that we were with them passed very happily.

It was a bright morning when the *Ballarat* steamed into Table Bay, and we said good-bye to the kind captain and crew. Matthew Craddock and the men went to a sailors' lodging-house, while my father, Mr. Merritt, my mother, Light o' the Dawn and I went to the house of a very respectable woman who took in boarders, and whose place was recommended to us by the captain of the *Ballarat*. My father immediately went to the authorities and acquainted them of the loss of the *Prester John*, making all the necessary affidavits, which he and Mr. Merritt signed. My mother and my sweetheart spent the afternoon buying little things which they needed.

I remember that evening distinctly. It was a sweet, soft evening with little friendly winds that came into the dining-room of the house, and played with the clean lace curtains. Strange little winds that made us feel at home in the place. Even my mother, who had been a little depressed since the burning of the *Prester John*, seemed happy and she smiled when my father joked with her.

"Brave Priscilla," he said gently, stroking her hand. "It is good to see you smiling."

"I feel happy," said my mother. "I don't know why. It's the kind of happiness that comes when you're expecting something wonderful to happen Although I don't know what could happen to me that——"

Mother stopped speaking, and we all turned our heads to the open door and listened. It was about nine o'clock, and it was quite dark in the small garden in front of the boarding-house. But we heard someone running along the little street, heard them stop at the garden gate; then there came the noise of quick footsteps on the gravel path leading to the door. There was the noise of heavy breathing—the breathing of several men who had evidently been running.

Someone cried out, "Captain Whittemore!" in a loud voice, a voice that was so strained that we did not recognize it.

"Who is it?" asked my father, standing up. "Who is there?"

"Captain! *Captain!*" came the voice "*Captain, where are you?*"

¶

WE were all on our feet now, all standing facing the door that led into the dark garden. The gravel pebbles made a curious noise as they splashed away from heavy boots; then suddenly, as if pushed forward by a hand, the cook of the *Prester John* appeared

in the doorway, and beside the cook, and clutched firmly by the cook's right hand, was The Boy from Bangor—The Boy that had made the heroic attempt to save Little Isobel on the night she was swept overboard!

The happening was so extraordinary that all of us in the dining-room were unable to speak. We just stood and stared at The Boy with our mouths open, and he stared back at us.

The cook, with a great effort, managed to control his wild attempts to get air into his lungs, and, with a sweep of his arm, he pointed to The Boy and spoke.

"Found him in a little dark street near the waterfront!" he gasped. "He was walking along, singing 'Golden beads and poppy seeds.' I grabbed him an' dragged him to a light, an' when I saw it was him I brought him here at a gallop!"

The mention of "golden beads" seemed to stir The Boy. He looked at my mother, moistened his lips, and began to chant in his singsong way the verse the cook had written in the long ago, and which Little Isobel loved to hear:

Golden beads and poppy seeds,
And lots of sugared tea.
With honey cake the mermaids bake
Down in the China Sea.
Oh, when my treasure ship comes home,
I'll buy them all for thee.

My mother sprang at him the moment he had finished; but my father, who was very wise, caught her arm and held her gently. "Steady, Priscilla," he said, "don't frighten him. I don't think he has improved with time. Go easy."

The Boy had not improved as we had noticed while he was chanting the poetry, but I think my father's intention at the moment was to prevent my mother from getting any hopes into her head that would upset her greatly if they were not realized.

My father led The Boy into the room, and shook his hand gently. The Boy laughed in a funny way, but he did not seem to know my father.

"You remember me," said my father. "I'm Captain Whittemore of the *Prester John*. Don't you remember the *Prester John?* The big ship with the great big sails that used to sail from Liverpool to all the ports of the world?"

The Boy from Bangor shook his head and grinned. It was quite plain that he did not remember a single thing about the *Prester John* or my father.

"Do you remember the evening when you were washed overboard?" asked my father "Washed off the deck into the sea?"

The Boy continued to grin; then he counted his fingers and laughed softly.

"Oh, John!" cried my mother. "John! John! Ask him about her! I cannot wait!"

My father put his hand on the shoulder of The Boy, and looked down into his face. It was very quiet in the room. The woman who owned the house had come into the room with a tray of cakes, and she stood near my mother, knowing well that something very unusual was happening.

"Listen," said my father, "when you were on the *Prester John* we had a little girl—a little girl named Isobel—and you used to sing her that song about 'Golden beads and poppy seeds.' Now, on the night you were swept overboard, Little Isobel was also swept overboard. You saw the big waves taking her, and you tried to save her. Little Isobel was her name. A little girl, you know? Do you—do you remember anything about her?"

The Boy from Bangor didn't answer. He stood looking from one face to the other, and we saw that he did not understand a single word that my father had said to him. The silence was horrible. It pressed against our ears and hurt us.

"Little Isobel!" cried my mother. "Little Isobel! Oh, tell me! *Please tell me!*"

The Boy looked at my mother, and laughed in that quiet way of his that hurt us all.

We stood and stared at him. Tears were streaming down my mother's cheeks. My father's lips were twitching. It was dreadful.

The Boy's eyes wandered round the room. He examined Mr. Merritt, looked for a long time at Light o' the Dawn, and then his eyes fell upon the woman who ran the boarding-house and who was standing near my mother, holding the tray of little cakes in her hand.

The Boy looked at the cakes, and the woman, who was a sweet, motherly woman, pushed the tray towards him. "Take some," she said softly.

The Boy put out his hand timidly and took a cake; then out of a pocket of his shabby coat he took a red bundle kerchief, and very carefully wrapped the cake in the kerchief.

The boarding-house lady told him to take another, and he did. The second cake he wrapped up like the first; then he stepped backward towards the door, holding the kerchief in his two hands.

"Priscilla!" cautioned my father. "Now now, Priscilla!"

"John!" gasped my mother. "*Oh John!* He—he——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted my father. "Don't get foolish ideas in your head!"

"But he is!" sobbed my mother. "He's taking them to someone! Don't lose sight of him! Follow him! Follow him! I know! *I know!*"

That was an awful thing for my father. I was very sorry for him at that moment. My mother was nearly hysterical and, although he had to try and throttle all the hopes that came into my mother's breast, he had also to obey her order.

¶

THE Boy plunged into the darkness of the little garden. We heard his feet crunching on the pebbles and we followed. Everyone followed, except the woman who kept the boarding-house. My father was in the lead; next to my father were Mr. Merritt and the cook; then I came, followed by my mother and Light o' the Dawn.

I remembered as I stumbled through the gate that the cook had told me years before that the Almighty never fools anyone, and the thought possibly soothed me a little. Very little, I think, because now I can recall the sick feeling that was in my stomach as I ran after the others, who were hardly visible, although they were only a few paces ahead. It was a very dark night.

Up one little street and down another we ran, The Boy lumbering along in front. Sometimes he was quite close; then he would turn down a little alley at great speed, and it would be hard work to catch up with him. Once we nearly lost him.

"Where did he go?" cried my father.

"I don't know," gasped Mr. Merritt. "He ran—— *Listen!*"

Out of the darkness to the right of where we were standing there came the voice of The Boy. He was chanting:

> With honey cake the mermaids bake
> Down in the China Sea.

My father dived into an opening to the right, and we stumbled on over all sorts of obstructions. I cried out to my mother and Light o' the Dawn, who were close behind.

Up the dark passage we went, following the voice of The Boy. My father fell, but got to his feet again before Mr. Merritt could reach him. The cook was sobbing softly as he ran. My mother was trying to tell me not to wait for her, but to keep up with The Boy, who was still chanting. Quite distinctly it came back to us:

> Oh, when my treasure ship comes in
> I'll buy them all for thee.

We ran through an old gateway towards a soft light that shone through a doorway. Before us we could see the figure of The Boy, and as we raced after him a woman and a little girl came to the lighted door, brought there by the chant. I heard my father make a curious noise as if he was in pain; then the little girl ran forward, and The Boy thrust into her hands the two cakes that he had got from the woman at our boarding-house. We heard her cry of delight; then my father flung out his big arms, and clutched the cook and Mr. Merritt.

"Wait!" he cried. "*Wait!* Let her mother go first!"

A mother has ways of getting knowledge that others do not know of. My mother did not stop when she came to the spot where my father, Mr. Merritt, the cook and I were standing. She went by us, without seeing us, her eyes fixed upon the little girl, who was now peering into the darkness. I heard my mother cry out something; then we stumbled forward to where she stood with Little Isobel in her arms!

Now this is the story that I wished to write of my father and my mother and of Little Isobel. We never knew how The Boy from Bangor rescued my sister. From what the woman told us, he was picked up holding Isobel in his arms, and was brought to Capetown by a tramp steamer. The captain of the steamer brought the two to the woman, and gave her a little money that the crew of the tramp collected among themselves. May God be kind to the crew of the tramp. The Boy earned a few pence by running messages, but most of his time he spent singing the only thing he could ever remember—the verse made by the cook. The cook, I think, was a great poet.

I have read the story to Light o' the Dawn, who likes it. She is still sewing upon the little shirt that I'll wager will not fit any baby ever born; but, then again, who am I to doubt the wisdom of women? My mother was very wise, and Light o' the Dawn has the wisdom of good wives.

# *Man and His Work*

## THE WISEST GOSPEL

THERE is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in work. Were he never so benighted, forgetful of his high calling, there is always hope in a man that actually and earnestly works: in Idleness alone is there perpetual despair. Work, never so Mammonish, mean, *is* in communication with Nature; the real desire to get work done will itself lead one more and more to truth, to Nature's appointments and regulations, which are truth. The latest Gospel in this world is, Know thy work and do it. "Know thyself": long enough has that poor "self" of thine tormented thee; thou wilt never get to "know" it, I believe! Think it not thy business, this of knowing thyself; thou art an unknowable individual: know what thou canst work at, and work at it, like a Hercules! That will be thy better plan. It has been written "an endless significance lies in Work"; a man perfects himself by working. Foul jungles are cleared away, fair seedfields rise instead, and stately cities; and withal the man himself fast ceases to be a jungle and foul and unwholesome desert thereby. Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work!

THOMAS CARLYLE.

THERE is not a creature, from England's king
To the peasant that delves the soil,
That knows half the pleasure the seasons bring
If he have not his share of toil.

BRYAN WALLER PROCTER.

## A CERTAIN SOURCE OF JOY

GO to the bottom—to what seems to you the bottom, but is really the top—take your place beside those who produce food for the hungry and clothes for the naked, and do not be afraid . it will not be worse, but better in all respects. Take your place in the ranks, set to work with your weak, unskilled hands at that primary work which feeds the hungry and clothes the naked: at bread-labour, the struggle with Nature; and you will feel, for the first time, firm ground beneath your feet, will feel that you are at home, that you are free and stand firmly, and have reached the end of your journey. And you will feel those complete, unpoisoned joys, which can be found nowhere else—not secured by any doors nor screened by any curtains.

LEO TOLSTOY (translated by Aylmer Maude).

## FORTUNE AIDS THE WORKER

BELIEVE it, industry is never wholly unfruitful. If it bring not joy with the in-coming profit, it will yet banish mischief from thy busied gates. There is a kind of good angel waiting upon diligence, that ever carries a laurel in his hand to crown her. Fortune, they said of old, should not be prayed unto, but with the hands in motion. The bosomed fist beckons the approach of poverty, and leaves besides, the noble head unguarded: but the lifted arm does frighten want, and is ever a shield to that noble director. How unworthy was that man of the world, that never did ought, but only lived and died.

OWEN FELTHAM.

## Essential to Well-Being

NOT to mention riches and honour, even food and raiment are not to be come at without the toil of the hands and the sweat of the brows. Providence furnishes materials, but expects that we should work them up ourselves. The earth must be laboured before it gives its increase; and when it is forced into its several products, how many hands must they pass through before they are fit for use? Manufactures, trade, and agriculture, naturally employ more than nineteen parts of the species in twenty; and as for those who are not obliged to labour, by the condition in which they are born, they are more miserable than the rest of mankind, unless they indulge themselves in that voluntary labour which goes by the name of exercise.

Joseph Addison.

A MAN that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heaven espy.

All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean
Which with his tincture "for Thy sake"
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.

George Herbert.

## Workers of Miracles

GENERALLY speaking, the life of all truly great men has been a life of intense and incessant labour. They have commonly passed the first half of life in the gross darkness of indigent humility—overlooked, mistaken, condemned by weaker men—thinking while others slept, reading while others rioted, feeling something within them that told them they should not always be kept down among the dregs of the world; and then, when their time was come, and some little accident has given them their first occasion, they have burst out into the light and glory of public life, rich with the spoils of time, and mighty in all the labours and struggles of the mind. Then do the multitude cry out—"A miracle of genius!" Yes, he *is* a miracle of genius, because he is a miracle of labour; because, instead of trusting to the resources of his own single mind, he has ransacked a thousand minds; because he makes use of the accumulated wisdom of ages, and takes as his point of departure the very last line and boundary to which science has advanced; because it has ever been the object of his life to assist every intellectual gift of nature, however munificent, and however splendid, with every resource that art could suggest, and every attention diligence could bestow.

Sydney Smith.

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# The Conscript

*Of a mother's racking ordeal in days of terror*

## By HONORÉ DE BALZAC

ON a certain evening in the month of November, 1793, the principal people of Carentan were gathered in the salon of Madame de Dey, at whose house the assembly was held daily. Some circumstances which would not have attracted attention in a large city, but which were certain to cause a flutter in a small one, lent to this customary meeting an unusual degree of interest. Two days before, Madame de Dey had closed her door to her guests, whom she had also excused herself from receiving on the preceding day, on the pretext of an indisposition. In ordinary times, these two occurrences would have produced the same effect in Carentan that the closing of all the theatres would produce in Paris. In those days existence was to a certain extent incomplete. And in 1793 the conduct of Madame de Dey might have had the most deplorable results. The slightest venturesome proceeding almost always became a question of life or death for the nobles of that period. In order to understand the intense curiosity and the narrow-minded cunning which enlivened the Norman countenances of all those people during the evening, but especially in order that we may share the secret anxiety of Madame de Dey, it is necessary to explain the rôle that she played at Carentan. As the critical position in which she found herself at that moment was undoubtedly identical with that of many people during the Revolution, the sympathies of more than one reader will give the needed touch of colour to this narrative.

Madame de Dey, the widow of a lieutenant-general and chevalier of the Orders, had left the court at the beginning of the emigration. As she possessed considerable property in the neighbourhood of Carentan, she had taken refuge there, hoping that the influence of the Terror would not be much felt so far from Paris. This prevision, based upon exact knowledge of the province, proved to be just. The Revolution did little devastation in Lower Normandy. Although, when Madame de Dey visited her estates formerly, she used to see only the noble families of the province, she had from policy thrown her house open to the leading *bourgeois* of the town, and to the new authorities, striving to make them proud of their conquest of her, without arousing either hatred or jealousy in their minds. Gracious and amiable, endowed with that indescribable gentleness of manner which attracts without resort to self-abasement or to entreaties, she had succeeded in winning general esteem by the most exquisite tact, the wise promptings of which had enabled her to maintain her stand on the narrow line where she could satisfy the demands of that mixed society, without humiliating the self-esteem of the parvenus or offending that of her former friends.

About thirty-eight years of age, she still retained, not that fresh and buxom beauty which distinguishes the young women of Lower Normandy, but a slender and, so to speak, aristocratic beauty. Her features were small and refined, her figure slender and willowy. When she spoke, her pale face would seem to brighten and to take on life. Her great black eyes were full of suavity, but their placid and devout expression seemed to indicate that the active principle of her existence had ceased to be. Married in the flower of her youth to an old and jealous soldier, the falseness of her position in the centre of a dissipated court contributed much, no doubt, to cast a veil of serious melancholy over a face on which the charm and vivacity of love must formerly have shone bright. Constantly obliged to restrain the ingenuous impulses, the emotions of a woman, at a time when she still feels instead of reflecting, passion had remained unsullied in the depths of her heart. So it was that her principal attraction was due to the youthful simplicity which at intervals her face betrayed, and which gave to her ideas a naïve expression of desire. Her aspect imposed respect, but there were

always in her bearing and in her voice symptoms of an outreaching towards an unknown future, as in a young girl; the most unsusceptible man soon found himself falling in love with her, and nevertheless retained a sort of respectful dread, inspired by her courteous manners, which were most imposing. Her soul, naturally great, and strengthened by painful struggles, seemed to be too far removed from the common herd, and men realised their limitations.

That soul necessarily demanded an exalted passion. So that Madame de Dey's affections were concentrated in a single sentiment, the sentiment of maternity. The happiness and pleasures of which her married life had been deprived, she found in her excessive love for her son. She loved him not only with the pure and profound devotion of a mother, but with the coquetry of a mistress, the jealousy of a wife. She was unhappy when separated from him, anxious during his absence, could never see enough of him, lived only in him and for him. In order to make men understand the strength of this feeling, it will suffice to add that this son was not only Madame de Dey's only child, but her last remaining relative, the only living being to whom she could attach the fears, the hopes, and the joys of her life. The late Count de Dey was the last scion of his family, as she was the last heiress of hers. Thus human schemes and interests were in accord with the noblest cravings of the soul to intensify in the countess's heart a sentiment which is always strong in women. She had brought up her son only with infinite difficulty, which had made him dearer than ever to her; twenty times the doctors prophesied his death; but, trusting in her presentiments and her hopes, she had the inexpressible joy of seeing him pass through the dangers of childhood unscathed, and of exulting in the upbuilding of his constitution in spite of the decrees of the faculty.

Thanks to constant care, her son had grown and had attained such perfect development, that at twenty years of age he was considered one of the most accomplished cavaliers at Versailles. Lastly—a piece of good fortune which does not crown the efforts of all mothers—she was adored by her son; their hearts were bound together by sympathies that were fraternal. Even if they had not been connected by the decree of nature, they would have felt instinctively for each other that affection of one being for another so rarely met with in life. Appointed sub-lieutenant of dragoons at eighteen, the young man had complied with the prevailing ideas of the requirements of honour at that period, by following the princes when they emigrated.

Thus Madame de Dey, of noble birth, wealthy, and the mother of an émigré, was fully alive to the dangers of her painful situation. As she had no other aim than to preserve a great fortune for her son, she had renounced the happiness of accompanying him; but, when she read the harsh laws by virtue of which the Republic daily confiscated the property of the émigrés at Carentan, she applauded herself for her courageous act. Was she not guarding her son's treasures at the peril of her life? Then when she learned of the shocking executions ordered by the Convention, she slept undisturbed, happy to know that her only treasure was in safety, far from all perils and all scaffolds. She took pleasure in the belief that she had adopted the best course to save all his fortunes at once. Making the concessions to this secret thought which the disasters of the time demanded, without compromising her womanly dignity or her aristocratic beliefs, she enveloped her sorrows in impenetrable mystery. She had realised the difficulties which awaited her at Carentan. To go thither and assume the first place in society—was it not equivalent to defying the scaffold every day? But sustained by a mother's courage, she succeeded in winning the affection of the poor by relieving all sorts of misery indiscriminately, and made herself necessary to the rich by taking the lead in their pleasures.

She received the prosecuting attorney of the commune, the mayor, the president of the district, the public accuser, and even the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal. The first four of these functionaries, being unmarried, paid court to her, in the hope of marrying her whether by terrifying her by the injury which they had it in their power to do her, or by offering her their protection. The public accuser, formerly an attorney at Caen, where he had been employed by the countess, tried to win her love by conduct full of devotion and generosity. A dangerous scheme! He was the most formidable of all the suitors. He alone was thoroughly acquainted with the condition of his former client's large fortune. His passion was inevitably intensified by all the cravings of

an avarice which rested upon almost unlimited power, upon the right of life or death throughout the district. This man, who was still young, displayed so much nobility in his behaviour that Madame de Dey had been unable as yet to make up her mind concerning him. But, scorning the danger that lay in a contest of wits with Normans, she employed the inventive genius and the cunning which nature has allotted to woman, to play those rivals against one another. By gaining time, she hoped to arrive safe and sound at the end of her troubles. At that time, the royalists in the interior of France flattered themselves that each day would see the close of the Revolution; and that conviction was the ruin of a great many of them.

Despite these obstacles, the countess had skilfully maintained her independence down to the day when, with incomprehensible imprudence, she had conceived the idea of closing her door. The interest which she inspired was so profound and so genuine that the people who came to her house that evening were greatly distressed when they learned that it was impossible for her to receive them; then, with the outspoken curiosity which is a part of provincial manners, they inquired concerning the misfortune, the sorrow, or the disease which had afflicted Madame de Dey. To these questions, an old housekeeper called Brigitte replied that her mistress had shut herself into her room, and would not see anybody, not even her servants. The cloistral existence, so to speak, which the people of a small town lead, gives birth in them to such an unconquerable habit of analysing and commenting upon the actions of other people, that, after expressing their sympathy for Madame de Dey, without an idea whether she was really happy or unhappy, they all began to speculate upon the causes of her abrupt seclusion.

"If she were ill," said one curious individual, "she would have sent for the doctor; but the doctor was at my house all day, playing chess. He said with a laugh that in these days there is but one disease, and that is unfortunately incurable."

This jest was put forward apologetically. Thereupon, men, women, old men, and maidens began to search the vast field of conjecture. Every one fancied that he caught a glimpse of a secret, and that secret engrossed the imaginations of them all. The next day, the suspicions became embittered. As life in a small town is open to all, the women were the first to learn that Brigitte had laid in more supplies than usual at the market. That fact could not be denied. Brigitte had been seen in the morning, in the square, and—a most extraordinary thing—she had bought the only hare that was offered for sale. Now the whole town knew that Madame de Dey did not like game. The hare became the starting-point for endless suppositions. When taking their daily walk, old men observed in the countess's house a sort of concentrated activity which was made manifest by the very precautions which the servants took to conceal it. The valet was seen beating a rug in the garden; on the day before, no one would have paid any heed to it; but that rug became a link in the chain of evidence to support the romances which everybody was engaged in constructing. Every person had his own.

¶

ON the second day, when they learned that Madame de Dey proclaimed that she was indisposed, the principal persons of Carentan met in the evening at the house of the mayor's brother, an ex-merchant, a married man, of upright character and generally esteemed, and for whom the countess entertained a high regard. There all the aspirants to the rich widow's hand had a more or less probable story to tell; and each of them hoped to turn to his advantage the secret circumstances which forced her to compromise herself thus. The public accuser imagined a complete drama in which Madame de Dey's son was brought to her house by night. The mayor favoured the idea of a priest who had not taken the oath, arriving from La Vendée and asking her for shelter; but the purchase of a hare on Friday embarrassed the mayor greatly. The president of the district was strong in his conviction that it was a leader of Chouans or of Vendeans, hotly pursued. Others suggested a nobleman escaped from one of the prisons of Paris. In short, one and all suspected the countess of being guilty of one of those acts of generosity which the laws of that day stigmatised as crimes, and which might lead to the scaffold. The public accuser said in an undertone that they must hold their tongues, and try to snatch the unfortunate woman from the abyss towards which she was rapidly precipitating herself.

"If you talk about this business," he added, "I shall be obliged to interfere, to search her house, and then——"

He did not finish his sentence, but they all understood his reticence.

The countess's sincere friends were so alarmed for her that, during the morning of the third day, the procureur-syndic of the commune caused his wife to write her a note to urge her to receive as usual that evening. The old merchant, being bolder, called at Madame de Dey's house in the morning. Trusting in the service which he proposed to render her, he demanded to be shown to her presence, and was thunderstruck when he saw her in the garden, engaged in cutting the last flowers from the beds, to supply her vases.

"Doubtless she has been sheltering her lover," said the old man to himself, seized with compassion for the fascinating woman.

The strange expression on the countess's face confirmed him in his suspicions. Deeply touched by that devotion so natural to a woman, and which always moves our admiration, because all men are flattered by the sacrifices which a woman makes for a man, the merchant informed the countess of the reports which were current in the town, and of the dangerous position in which she stood.

"But," he said, as he concluded, "although there are some among our officials who are not indisposed to forgive you for an act of heroism of which a priest is the object, no one will pity you if they discover that you are sacrificing yourself to the affections of the heart."

At these words Madame de Dey looked at the old man with an expression of desperation and terror which made him shudder, old man though he was.

"Come," said she, taking his hand and leading him to her bedroom, where, after making sure that they were alone, she took from her bosom a soiled and wrinkled letter. "Read," she cried, making a violent effort to pronounce the word.

She fell into her chair as if utterly overwhelmed. While the old gentleman was feeling for his spectacles and wiping them, she fastened her eyes upon him and scrutinised him for the first time with curiosity; then she said softly, in an altered voice:

"I trust you."

"Am I not sharing your crime?" replied the old man, simply.

She started; for the first time her heart found itself in sympathy with another heart in that little town. The old merchant suddenly understood both the distress and the joy of the countess. Her son had taken part in the Granville expedition; he wrote to his mother from prison, imparting to her one sad but sweet hope. Having no doubt of his success in escaping, he mentioned three days in which he might appear at her house in disguise. The fatal letter contained heart-rending farewells in case he should not be at Carentan on the evening of the third day; and he begged his mother to hand a considerable sum of money to the messenger, who had undertaken to carry that letter to her through innumerable perils. The paper shook in the old man's hand.

"And this is the third day!" cried Madame de Dey, as she sprang to her feet, seized the letter, and began to pace the floor.

"You have been imprudent," said the merchant; "why did you lay in provisions?"

"Why, he may arrive almost starved, worn out with fatigue, and——"

She did not finish.

"I am sure of my brother," said the old man, "and I will go and enlist him on your side."

In this emergency the old tradesman recovered the shrewdness which he had formerly displayed in his business, and gave advice instinct with prudence and sagacity. After agreeing upon all that they were both to say and to do, the old man went about on cleverly devised pretexts, to the principal houses of Carentan, where he announced that Madame de Dey, whom he had just seen, would receive that evening in spite of her indisposition. Pitting his shrewdness against the inborn Norman cunning, in the examination to which each family subjected him in regard to the nature of the countess's illness, he succeeded in leading astray almost everybody who was interested in that mysterious affair. His first visit produced a marvellous effect. He stated, in the presence of a gouty old lady, that Madame de Dey had nearly died of an attack of gout in the stomach; as the famous Tronchin had once recommended her, in such a case, to place on her chest the skin of a hare, flayed alive, and to stay in bed and not move the countess, who had been at death's door two days before, having followed scrupulously Tronchin's advice, found herself sufficiently recovered to see those who cared to call on her that evening. That

fable had a prodigious success, and the Carentan doctor, a royalist in secret, added to its effect by the air of authority with which he discussed the remedy. Nevertheless, suspicion had taken too deep root in the minds of some obstinate persons, or some philosophers, to be entirely dispelled; so that, in the evening, those who were regular habitués of Madame de Dey's salon arrived there early; some in order to watch her face, others from friendly regard; and the majority were impressed by the marvellous nature of her recovery.

¶

THEY found the countess seated at the corner of the huge fireplace of her salon, which was almost as modestly furnished as those of the people of Carentan; for, in order not to offend the sensitive self-esteem of her guests, she denied herself the luxury to which she had always been accustomed, and had changed nothing in her house. The floor of the reception-room was not even polished. She left old-fashioned dark tapestries on the walls, she retained the native furniture, burned tallow candles, and followed the customs of the town, espousing provincial life, and recoiling neither from the most rasping pettinesses nor the most unpleasant privations. But, realising that her guests would forgive her for any display of splendour which aimed at their personal comfort, she neglected nothing when it was a question of affording them enjoyment; so that she always gave them excellent dinners. She even went so far as to make a pretence at miserliness, to please those calculating minds; and after causing certain concessions in the way of luxurious living to be extorted from her, she seemed to comply with a good grace.

About seven o'clock in the evening, therefore, the best of the uninteresting society of Carentan was assembled at her house, and formed a large circle about the fireplace. The mistress of the house, sustained in her misery by the compassionate glances which the old tradesman bestowed upon her, submitted with extraordinary courage to the minute questionings, the trivial and stupid reasoning of her guests. But at every blow of the knocker at her door, and whenever she heard footsteps in the street, she concealed her emotion by raising some question of interest to the welfare of the province. She started noisy discussions concerning the quality of the season's cider, and was so well seconded by her confidant that her company almost forgot to watch her, her manner was so natural and her self-possession so imperturbable. The public accuser and one of the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal sat silent, carefully watching every movement of her face and listening to every sound in the house, notwithstanding the uproar; and on several occasions they asked her very embarrassing questions, which, however, the countess answered with marvellous presence of mind. Mothers have such an inexhaustible store of courage.

When Madame de Dey had arranged the card-tables, placed everybody at a table of boston, reversis, or whist, she remained a few moments talking with some young people, with the utmost nonchalance, playing her part like a consummate actress. She suggested a game of loto—said that she alone knew where it was, and disappeared.

"I am suffocating, my poor Brigitte!" she cried, wiping away the tears that gushed from her eyes, which gleamed with fever, anxiety, and impatience. "He does not come," she continued, looking about the chamber to which she had flown. "Here, I breathe again and I live. A few moments more, and he will be here; for he still lives, I am certain; my heart tells me so! Do you hear nothing, Brigitte? Oh I would give the rest of my life to know whether he is in prison or travelling through the country! I would like not to think——"

She looked about again to make sure that everything was in order in the room. A bright fire was burning on the hearth; the shutters were carefully closed; the furniture glistened with cleanliness; the way in which the bed was made proved that the countess had assisted Brigitte in the smallest details; and her hopes betrayed themselves in the scrupulous care which seemed to have been taken in that room, where the sweet charm of love and its most chaste caresses exhaled in the perfume of the flowers. A mother alone could have anticipated the desires of a soldier, and have arranged to fulfil them all so perfectly. A dainty meal, choice wines, clean linen, and dry clothes—in a word, all that was likely to be necessary or agreeable to a weary traveller was there set forth, so that he need lack nothing, so that the joy of home might make known to him a mother's love.

"Brigitte?" said the countess in a heart-rending tone, as she placed a chair at the

table, as if to give reality to her longings, to intensify the strength of her illusions.

" Oh ! he will come, madame ; he isn't far away. I don't doubt that he's alive and on his way here," replied Brigitte. " I put a key in the Bible and I held it on my fingers while Cottin read the Gospel of St. John ; and, madame, the key didn't turn."

" Is that a sure sign ? " asked the countess.

" Oh ! it is certain, madame ; I would wager my salvation that he is still alive. God can't make a mistake."

" Despite the danger that awaits him here, I would like right well to see him."

" Poor Monsieur Auguste ! " cried Brigitte ; " I suppose he is somewhere on the road, on foot ! "

" And there is the church clock striking eight ! " cried the countess, in dismay.

She was afraid that she had remained longer than she ought in that room, where she had faith in the life of her son because she looked upon all that meant life to him. She went downstairs ; but before entering the salon, she stood a moment in the vestibule, listening to see if any sound woke the silent echoes of the town. She smiled at Brigitte's husband, who was on sentry-duty, and whose eyes seemed dazed by dint of strained attention to the murmurs in the square and in the streets. She saw her son in everything and everywhere. In a moment she returned to the salon, affecting a jovial air, and began to play loto with some young girls ; but from time to time she complained of feeling ill, and returned to her chair at the fireplace.

¶

SUCH was the condition of persons and things in the house of Madame de Dey, while, on the road from Paris to Cherbourg, a young man dressed in a dark carmagnole, the regulation costume at that period, strode along towards Carentan. At the beginning of the conscription, there was little or no discipline. The demands of the moment made it impossible for the Republic to equip all of its soldiers at once, and it was no rare thing to see the roads covered with conscripts still wearing their civilian dress. These young men marched in advance of their battalions to the halting-places, or loitered behind, for their progress was regulated by their ability to endure the fatigue of a long march.

The traveller with whom we have to do was some distance in advance of the column of conscripts on its way to Cherbourg, which the mayor of Carentan was momentarily expecting, in order to distribute lodging-tickets among them. The young man walked with a heavy but still firm step, and his bearing seemed to indicate that he had long been familiar with the hardships of military life. Although the moon was shining on the pastures about Carentan, he had noticed some great white clouds which seemed on the point of discharging snow upon the country, and the fear of being surprised by a storm doubtless quickened his gait, which was more rapid than his weariness made comfortable. He had an almost empty knapsack on his back, and carried in his hand a boxwood cane, cut from one of the high, broad hedges formed by that shrub around most of the estates in Lower Normandy. The solitary traveller entered Carentan, whose towers, of fantastic aspect in the moonlight, had appeared to him a moment before. His steps awoke the echoes of the silent streets, where he met no one ; he was obliged to ask a weaver who was still at work to point out the mayor's abode. That magistrate lived only a short distance away, and the conscript soon found himself safe under the porch of his house, where he seated himself on a stone bench, waiting for the lodging-ticket which he had asked for. But, being summoned by the mayor, he appeared before him, and was subjected to a careful examination. The soldier was a young man of attractive appearance, who apparently belonged to some family of distinction. His manner indicated noble birth, and the intelligence due to a good education was manifest in his features.

" What is your name ? " the mayor asked, with a shrewd glance at him.

" Julien Jussieu," replied the conscript.

" And you come from— ? " said the magistrate, with an incredulous smile.

" From Paris."

" Your comrades must be far behind ? " continued the Norman in a mocking tone.

" I am three leagues ahead of the battalion."

" Doubtless some sentimental reason brings you to Carentan, citizen conscript ? " queried the mayor, slyly. " It is all right," he added, imposing silence, with a wave of the hand, upon the young man, who was about to speak. " We know where to send you. Here," he said, handing him the lodging-ticket ; " here, *Citizen Jussieu.*"

There was a perceptible tinge of irony in the tone in which the magistrate uttered these last two words, as he held out a ticket upon which Madame de Dey's name was written. The young man read the address with an air of curiosity.

" He knows very well that he hasn't far to go, and when he gets outside, it won't take him long to cross the square," cried the mayor, speaking to himself, while the young man went out. " He's a bold young fellow. May God protect him ! He has an answer for everything. However, if any other than I had asked to see his papers, he would have been lost ! "

At that moment the clock of Carentan struck half-past nine ; the torches were being lighted in Madame de Dey's anteroom, and the servants were assisting their masters and mistresses to put on their cloaks, their overcoats, and their mantles ; the card-players had settled their accounts and were about to withdraw in a body, according to the usual custom in all small towns.

" It seems that the public accuser proposes to remain," said a lady, observing that that important functionary was missing when they were about to separate to seek their respective homes, after exhausting all the formulas of leave-taking.

The redoubtable magistrate was in fact alone with the countess, who waited in fear and trembling until it should please him to go.

" Citizeness," he said at length, after a long silence in which there was something horrible, " I am here to see that the laws of the Republic are observed."

Madame de Dey shuddered.

" Have you no revelations to make to me ? " he demanded.

" None," she replied in amazement.

" Ah, madame ! " cried the accuser, sitting down beside her and changing his tone, " at this moment, for lack of a word, either you or I may bring our heads to the scaffold. I have observed your temperament, your heart, your manners, too closely to share the error into which you have led your guests to-night. You are expecting your son, I am absolutely certain."

The countess made a gesture of denial ; but she had turned pale, the muscles of her face had contracted, by virtue of the overpowering necessity to display a deceitful calmness, and the accuser's implacable eye lost none of her movements.

" Very well ; receive him," continued the revolutionary magistrate : " but do not let him remain under your roof later than seven o'clock in the morning. At daybreak I shall come here armed with a denunciation which I shall procure."

She gazed at him with a stupefied air, which would have aroused the pity of a tigress.

" I shall prove," he said in a gentle tone, " the falseness of the denunciation by a thorough search, and the nature of my report will place you out of the reach of any future suspicion. I shall speak of your patriotic gifts, of your true citizenship, and we shall *all* be saved."

Madame de Dey feared a trap ; she did not move, but her face was on fire and her tongue was frozen. A blow of the knocker rang through the house.

" Ah ! " cried the terrified mother, falling on her knees. " Save him ! save him ! "

" Yes, let us save him," rejoined the public accuser, with a passionate glance at her ; " let us save him though it cost *us* our lives."

" I am lost ! " she cried, while the accuser courteously raised her.

" O madame ! " he replied with a grand oratorical gesture, " I do not choose to owe you to any one but yourself."

" Madame, here he— " cried Brigitte, who thought that her mistress was alone.

At sight of the public accuser, the old servant, whose face was flushed with joy, became rigid and deathly pale.

" What is it, Brigitte ? " asked the magistrate, in a mild and meaning tone.

" A conscript that the mayor has sent here to lodge," replied the servant, showing the ticket.

" That is true," said the accuser, after reading the paper ; " a battalion is to arrive here to-night."

And he went out.

The countess was too anxious at that moment to believe in the sincerity of her former attorney to entertain the slightest suspicion ; she ran swiftly upstairs, having barely strength enough to stand upright ; then she opened the door of her bedroom, saw her son, and rushed into his arms, well-nigh lifeless.

" O my son, my son ! " she cried, sobbing, and covering him with frenzied kisses.

" Madame— " said the stranger.

" Oh ! it isn't he ! " she cried, stepping back in dismay and standing before the conscript, at whom she gazed with a haggard expression.

" Blessed Lord God, what a resemblance ! " said Brigitte.

There was a moment's silence, and the stranger himself shuddered at the aspect of Madame de Dey.

" Ah, monsieur ! " she said, leaning upon Brigitte's husband, and feeling then in all its force the grief of which the first pang had almost killed her ; " monsieur, I cannot endure to see you any longer ; allow my servants to take my place and to attend to your wants."

She went down to her own apartments. half carried by Brigitte and her old servant.

" What, madame ! " cried the maid, " is that man going to sleep in Monsieur Auguste's bed, wear Monsieur Auguste's slippers, eat the pie that I made for Monsieur Auguste ? They may guillotine me, but I——"

" Brigitte ! " cried Madame de Dey.

" Hold your tongue, chatterbox ! " said her husband in a low voice ; " do you want to kill madame ? "

At that moment the conscript made a noise in his room, drawing his chair to the table.

" I will not stay here," cried Madame de Dey ; " I will go to the greenhouse, where I can hear better what goes on outside during the night."

She was still wavering between fear of having lost her son and the hope of seeing him appear. The night was disquietingly silent. There was one ghastly moment for the countess, when the battalion of conscripts marched into the town, and each man repaired to his lodging. There were disappointed hopes at every footstep and every sound ; then nature resumed its terrible tranquillity. Towards morning the countess was obliged to return to her room. Brigitte, who watched her mistress every moment, finding that she did not come out again, went to her room and found the countess dead.

" She probably heard the conscript dressing and walking about in Monsieur Auguste's room, singing their d——d *Marseillaise* as if he were in a stable ! " cried Brigitte. " It was that which killed her ! "

The countess's death was caused by a more intense emotion, and probably by some terrible vision. At the precise moment when Madame de Dey died at Carentan, her son was shot in Le Morbihan. We might add this tragic story to the mass of other observations on that sympathy which defies the law of space—documents which some few solitary scholars are collecting with scientific curiosity, and which will one day serve as basis for a new science, a science which till now has lacked only its man of genius.

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# The Invisible Man

*Father Brown explains an apparently supernatural mystery*

**By G. K. CHESTERTON**

IN the cool blue twilight of two steep streets in Camden Town, the shop at the corner, a confectioner's, glowed like the butt of a cigar. One should rather say, perhaps, like the butt of a firework, for the light was of many colours and some complexity, broken up by many mirrors and dancing on many gilt and gaily-coloured cakes and sweetmeats. Against this one fiery glass were glued the noses of many gutter-snipes, for the chocolates were all wrapped in those red and gold and green metallic colours which are almost better than chocolate itself; and the huge white wedding-cake in the window was somehow at once remote and satisfying, just as if the whole North Pole were good to eat. Such rainbow provocations could naturally collect the youth of the neighbourhood up to the ages of ten or twelve. But this corner was also attractive to youth at a later stage; and a young man, not less than twenty-four, was staring into the same shop window. To him, also, the shop was of fiery charm, but this attraction was not wholly to be explained by chocolates—which, however, he was far from despising.

He was a tall, burly, red-haired young man, with a resolute face but a listless manner. He carried under his arm a flat, grey portfolio of black-and-white sketches, which he had sold with more or less success to publishers ever since his uncle (who was an admiral) had disinherited him for Socialism, because of a lecture which he had delivered against that economic theory. His name was John Turnbull Angus.

Entering at last, he walked through the confectioner's shop into the back room, which was a sort of pastry-cook restaurant, merely raising his hat to the young lady who was serving there. She was a dark, elegant, alert girl in black, with a high colour and very quick, dark eyes; and after the ordinary interval she followed him into the inner room to take his order.

His order was evidently a usual one. "I want, please," he said with precision, "one halfpenny bun and a small cup of black coffee." An instant before the girl could turn away he added: "Also, I want you to marry me."

The young lady of the shop stiffened suddenly and said: "Those are jokes I don't allow."

The red-haired young man lifted grey eyes of an unexpected gravity.

"Really and truly," he said, "it's as serious—as serious as the halfpenny bun. It is expensive, like the bun; one pays for it. It is indigestible. It hurts."

The dark young lady had never taken her dark eyes off him, but seemed to be studying him with almost tragic exactitude. At the end of her scrutiny she had something like the shadow of a smile, and she sat down in a chair.

"Don't you think," observed Angus, absently, "that it's rather cruel to eat these halfpenny buns? They might grow up into penny buns. I shall give up these brutal sports when we are married."

The dark young lady rose from her chair and walked to the window, evidently in a state of strong but not unsympathetic cogitation. When at last she swung round again with an air of resolution she was bewildered to observe that the young man was carefully laying out on the table various objects from the shop window. They included a pyramid of highly coloured sweets, several plates of sandwiches, and the two decanters containing that mysterious port and sherry which are peculiar to pastry-cooks. In the middle of this neat arrangement he had carefully let down the enormous load of white sugared cake which had been the huge ornament of the window.

"What on earth are you doing?" she asked.

"Duty, my dear Laura," he began.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, stop a minute," she cried, "and don't talk to me in that way. I mean, what is all that?"

'A ceremonial meal, Miss Hope."

"And what is *that?*" she asked impatiently, pointing to the mountain of sugar.

"The wedding-cake, Mrs. Angus," he said.

The girl marched to that article, removed it with some clatter, and put it back in the shop window; she then returned and, putting her elegant elbows on the table, regarded the young man not unfavourably but with considerable exasperation.

"You don't give me any time to think," she said.

"I'm not such a fool," he answered; "that's my Christian humility."

She was still looking at him; but she had grown considerably graver behind the smile.

"Mr. Angus," she said steadily, "before there is a minute more of this nonsense I must tell you something about myself as shortly as I can."

"Delighted," replied Angus gravely. "You might tell me something about myself, too, while you are about it."

"Oh, do hold your tongue and listen," she said. "It's nothing that I'm ashamed of, and it isn't even anything that I'm specially sorry about. But what would you say if there were something that is no business at all of mine and yet is my nightmare?"

"In that case," said the man seriously, "I should suggest that you bring back the cake."

"Well, you must listen to the story first," said Laura persistently. "To begin with, I must tell you that my father owned the inn called the 'Red Fish' at Ludbury, and I used to serve people in the bar."

"I have often wondered," he said, "why there was a kind of a Christian air about this one confectioner's shop."

"Ludbury is a sleepy, grassy little hole in the Eastern Counties, and the only kind of people who ever came to the Red Fish were occasional commercial travellers and, for the rest, the most awful people you can see, only you've never seen them. I mean little loungy men, who had just enough to live on and had nothing to do but lean about in bar-rooms and bet on horses, in bad clothes that were just too good for them. Even these wretched young rotters were not very common at our house; but there were two of them that were a lot too common—common in every sort of way. They both lived on money of their own and were wearisomely idle and overdressed. But yet I was a bit sorry for them, because I half believe they slunk into our little empty bar because each of them had a slight deformity; the sort of thing that some yokels laugh at. It wasn't exactly a deformity either; it was more an oddity. One of them was a surprisingly small man, something like a dwarf, or at least like a jockey. He was not at all jockeyish to look at, though; he had a round, black head and a well-trimmed black beard, bright eyes like a bird's; he jingled money in his pockets; he jangled a great gold watch-chain; and he never turned up except dressed just too much like a gentleman to be one. He was no fool though, though a futile idler; he was curiously clever at all kinds of things that couldn't be the slightest use; a sort of impromptu conjuring, making fifteen matches set fire to each other like a regular firework, or cutting a banana or some such thing into a dancing doll. His name was Isidore Smythe; and I can see him still, with his little dark face, just coming up to the counter, making a jumping kangaroo out of five cigars.

"The other fellow was more silent and more ordinary; but somehow he alarmed me much more than poor little Smythe. He was very tall and slight, and light-haired; his nose had a high bridge, and he might almost have been handsome in a spectral sort of way; but he had one of the most appalling squints I have ever seen or heard of. When he looked straight at you, you didn't know where you were yourself, let alone what he was looking at. I fancy this sort of disfigurement embittered the poor chap a little; for while Smythe was ready to show off his monkey tricks anywhere, James Welkin (that was the squinting man's name) never did anything except soak in our bar-parlour, and go for great walks by himself in the flat, grey country all round. All the same, I think Smythe, too, was a little sensitive about being so small though he carried it off more smartly. And so it was that I was really puzzled, as well as startled, and very sorry, when they both offered to marry me in the same week.

"Well, I did what I've since thought was perhaps a silly thing. But, after all, these freaks were my friends in a way; and I had a horror of their thinking I refused them for the real reason, which was that they were so impossibly ugly. So I made

up some gas of another sort, about never meaning to marry anyone who hadn't carved his way in the world. I said it was a point of principle with me not to live on money that was just inherited like theirs. Two days after I had talked in this well-meaning sort of way, the whole trouble began. The first thing I heard was that both of them had gone off to seek their fortunes, as if they were in some silly fairy tale.

"Well, I've never seen either of them from that day to this. But I've had two letters from the little man called Smythe, and really they were rather exciting."

"Ever heard of the other man?" asked Angus.

"No, he never wrote," said the girl, after an instant's hesitation. "Smythe's first letter was simply to say that he had started out walking with Welkin to London; but Welkin was such a good walker that the little man dropped out of it and took a rest by the roadside. He happened to be picked up by some travelling show and, partly because he was nearly a dwarf and partly because he was really a clever little wretch, he got on quite well in the show business, and was soon sent up to the Aquarium to do some tricks that I forget. That was his first letter. His second was much more of a startler, and I only got it last week."

The man called Angus emptied his coffee-cup and regarded her with mild and patient eyes. Her own mouth took a slight twist of laughter as she resumed: "I suppose you've seen on the hoardings all about this 'Smythe's Silent Service'? Or you must be the only person that hasn't. Oh, I don't know much about it, it's some clockwork invention for doing all the housework by machinery. You know the sort of thing: 'Press a button—A Butler who Never Drinks.' 'Turn a handle—Ten Housemaids who Never Flirt.' You must have seen the advertisements. Well, whatever these machines are, they are making pots of money; and they are making it all for that little imp whom I knew down in Ludbury. I can't help feeling pleased the poor little chap has fallen on his feet; but the plain fact is, I'm in terror of his turning up any minute and telling me he's carved his way in the world—as he certainly has."

"And the other man?" repeated Angus with a sort of obstinate quietude.

Laura Hope got to her feet suddenly. "My friend," she said, "I think you are a witch. Yes, you are quite right. I have not seen a line of the other man's writing; and I have no more notion than the dead of what or where he is. But it is of him that I am frightened. It is he who is all about my path. It is he who has half driven me mad. Indeed, I think he has driven me mad; for I have felt him where he could not have been and I have heard his voice when he could not have spoken."

"Well, my dear," said the young man cheerfully, "if he were Satan himself, he is done for now you have told somebody. One goes mad all alone, old girl. But when was it you fancied you felt and heard our squinting friend?"

"I heard James Welkin laugh as plainly as I hear you speak," said the girl steadily. "There was nobody there, for I stood just outside the shop at the corner and could see down both streets at once. I had forgotten how he laughed, though his laugh was as odd as his squint. I had not thought of him for nearly a year. But it's a solemn truth that a few seconds later the first letter came from his rival."

"Did you ever make the spectre speak or squeak, or anything?" asked Angus, with some interest.

¶

LAURA suddenly shuddered and then said, with an unshaken voice: "Yes. Just when I had finished reading the second letter from Isidore Smythe announcing his success, just then, I heard Welkin say: 'He shan't have you, though.' It was quite plain, as if he were in the room. It is awful; I think I must be mad."

"If you really were mad," said the young man, "you would think you must be sane. But certainly there seems to me to be something a little rum about this unseen gentleman. Two heads are better than one—I spare you allusions to any other organs—and really, if you would allow me, as a sturdy, practical man, to bring back the wedding-cake out of the window——"

Even as he spoke, there was a sort of steely shriek in the street outside, and a small motor, driven at devilish speed, shot up to the door of the shop and stuck there. In the same flash of time a small man in a shiny top-hat stood stamping in the outer room.

Angus, who had hitherto maintained hilarious ease from motives of mental hygiene, revealed the strain of his soul by

striding abruptly out of the inner room and confronting the new-comer. A glance at him was quite sufficient to confirm the savage guesswork of a man in love. This very dapper but dwarfish figure, with the spike of black beard carried insolently forward, the clever unrestful eyes, the neat but very nervous fingers, could be none other than the man just described to him: Isidore Smythe, who made dolls out of banana skins and matchboxes; Isidore Smythe, who made millions out of undrinking butlers and unflirting housemaids of metal. For a moment the two men, instinctively understanding each other's air of possession, looked at each other with that curious cold generosity which is the soul of rivalry.

Mr. Smythe, however, made no allusion to the ultimate ground of their antagonism, but said simply and explosively: "Has Miss Hope seen that thing on the window?"

"On the window?" repeated the staring Angus.

"There's no time to explain other things," said the small millionaire shortly. "There's some tomfoolery going on here that has to be investigated."

He pointed his polished walking-stick at the window, recently depleted by the bridal preparations of Mr. Angus; and that gentleman was astonished to see along the front of the glass a long strip of paper pasted, which had certainly not been on the window when he had looked through it some time before. Following the energetic Smythe outside into the street, he found that some yard-and-a-half of stamp paper had been carefully gummed along the glass outside, and on this was written in straggly characters: "If you marry Smythe, he will die."

"Laura," said Angus, putting his big red head into the shop, "you're not mad."

"It's the writing of that fellow, Welkin," said Smythe gruffly. "I haven't seen him for years, but he's always bothering me. Five times in the last fortnight he's had threatening letters left at my flat, and I can't even find out who leaves them, let alone if it is Welkin himself. The porter of the flats swears that no suspicious characters have been seen, and here he has pasted up a sort of dado on a public shop-window, while the people in the shop——"

"Quite so," said Angus modestly, "while the people in the shop were having tea. Well, sir, I can assure you I appreciate your common sense in dealing so directly with the matter. We can talk about other things afterwards. The fellow cannot be very far off yet, for I swear there was no paper there when I went last to the window, ten or fifteen minutes ago. On the other hand, he's too far off to be chased, as we don't even know the direction. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Smythe, you'll put this at once in the hands of some energetic inquiry man, private rather than public. I know an extremely clever fellow, who has set up in business five minutes from here in your car. His name's Flambeau and, though his youth was a bit stormy, he's a strictly honest man now, and his brains are worth money. He lives in Lucknow Mansions, Hampstead."

"That is odd," said the little man, arching his black eyebrows. "I live, myself, in Himylaya Mansions, round the corner. Perhaps you might care to come with me; I can go to my rooms and sort out these queer Welkin documents, while you run round and get your friend the detective."

"You are very good," said Angus politely. "Well, the sooner we act the better."

Both men, with a queer kind of impromptu fairness, took the same sort of formal farewell of the lady, and both jumped into the brisk little car. As Smythe took the handles and they turned the great corner of the street, Angus was amused to see a gigantesque poster of "Smythe's Silent Service," with a picture of a huge headless iron doll, carrying a saucepan with the legend, "A Cook Who is Never Cross."

"I use them in my own flat," said the little black-bearded man, laughing, "partly for advertisement and partly for real convenience. Honestly, and all above board, those big clockwork dolls of mine do bring you coals or claret or a time-table quicker than any live servants I've ever known, if you know which knob to press.

But I'll never deny, between ourselves, that such servants have their disadvantages, as well."

"Indeed?" said Angus. "Is there something they can't do?"

"Yes," replied Smythe coolly; "they can't tell me who left those threatening letters at my flat."

The man's motor was small and swift like himself; in fact, like his domestic

service, it was of his own invention. If he was an advertising quack, he was one who believed in his own wares. The sense of something tiny and flying was accentuated as they swept up long white curves of road in the dead but open daylight of evening. Soon the white curves came sharper and dizzier; they were upon ascending spirals, as they say in the modern religions. For, indeed, they were cresting a corner of London which is almost as precipitous as Edinburgh, if not quite so picturesque. Terrace rose above terrace, and the special tower of flats they sought, rose above them all to almost Egyptian height, gilt by the level sunset. The change, as they turned the corner and entered the crescent known as Himylaya Mansions, was as abrupt as the opening of a window; for they found that pile of flats sitting above London as above a green sea of slate. Opposite to the mansions, on the other side of the gravel crescent, was a bushy enclosure more like a steep hedge or dyke than a garden, and some way below that ran a strip of artificial water, a sort of canal, like the moat of that embowered fortress.

As the car swept round the crescent, it passed, at one corner, the stray stall of a man selling chestnuts; and right away at the other end of the curve Angus could see a dim blue policeman walking slowly. These were the only human shapes in that high suburban solitude; but he had an irrational sense that they expressed the speechless poetry of London. He felt as if they were figures in a story.

¶

THE little car shot up to the right house like a bullet, and shot out its owner like a bombshell. He was immediately inquiring of a tall commissionaire in shining braid, and a short porter in shirt sleeves, whether anybody or anything had been seeking his apartments. He was assured that nobody and nothing had passed these officials since his last inquiries; whereupon he and the slightly bewildered Angus were shot up in the lift like a rocket, till they reached the top floor.

"Just come in for a minute," said the breathless Smythe. "I want to show you those Welkin letters. Then you might run round the corner and fetch your friend." He pressed a button concealed in the wall, and the door opened of itself.

It opened on a long, commodious anteroom, of which the only arresting features, ordinarily speaking, were the rows of tall half-human mechanical figures that stood up on both sides like tailors' dummies. Like tailors' dummies they were headless, and like tailors' dummies they had a handsome unnecessary humpiness in the shoulders and a pigeon-breasted protuberance of chest; but, barring this, they were not much more like a human figure than any automatic machine at a station that is about the human height. They had two great hooks, like arms, for carrying trays; and they were painted pea-green, or vermilion, or black, for convenience of distinction; in every other way they were only automatic machines, and nobody would have looked twice at them. On this occasion, at least, nobody did. For between the two rows of these domestic dummies lay something more interesting than most of the mechanics of the world. It was a white, tattered scrap of paper scrawled with red ink; and the agile inventor had snatched it up almost as soon as the door flew open. He handed it to Angus without a word. The red ink on it actually was not dry, and the message ran: "If you have been to see her to-day, I shall kill you."

There was a short silence, and then Isidore Smythe said quietly: "Would you like a little whisky? I rather feel as if I should."

"Thank you; I should like a little, Smythe," said Angus gloomily. "This business seems to me to be getting rather grave. I'm going round at once to fetch Flambeau."

"Right you are," said the other with admirable cheerfulness. "Bring him round here as quick as you can."

But as Angus closed the front door behind him he saw Smythe push back a button, and one of the clockwork images glided from its place and slide along a groove in the floor carrying a tray with syphon and decanter. There did seem something a trifle weird about leaving the little man alone among those dead servants, who were coming to life as the door closed.

Six steps down from Smythe's landing the man in shirt sleeves was doing something with a pail. Angus stopped to extract a promise, fortified with a prospective bribe, that he would remain in that place until the return with the detective and would keep count of any kind of stranger coming up those stairs. Dashing down to the front

hall, he then laid similar charges of vigilance on the commissionaire at the front door, from whom he learned the simplifying circumstance that there was no back door. Not content with this, he captured the floating policeman and induced him to stand opposite the entrance and watch it; and finally paused an instant for a penny-worth of chestnuts and an inquiry as to the probable length of the merchant's stay in the neighbourhood.

The chestnut seller, turning up the collar of his coat, told him he should probably be moving shortly, as he thought it was going to snow. Indeed, the evening was growing grey and bitter; but Angus, with all his eloquence, proceeded to nail the chestnut man to his post.

"Keep yourself warm on your own chestnuts," he said earnestly. "Eat up your whole stock; I'll make it worth your while. I'll give you a sovereign if you'll wait here till I come back and then tell me whether any man, woman or child has gone into that house where the commissionaire is standing."

He then walked away smartly, with a last look at the besieged tower.

"I've made a ring round that room, anyhow," he said. "They can't all four of them be Mr. Welkin's accomplices."

Lucknow Mansions were, so to speak, on a lower platform of that hill of houses, of which Himylaya Mansions might be called the peak. Mr. Flambeau's semi-official flat was on the ground floor, and presented in every way a marked contrast to the American machinery and cold, hotel-like luxury of the flat of the Silent Service. Flambeau, who was a friend of Angus, received him in a rococo artistic den behind his office, of which the ornaments were sabres, harquebuses, Eastern curiosities, flasks of Italian wine, savage cooking-pots, a plumy Persian cat, and a small dusty-looking Roman Catholic priest, who looked particularly out of place.

"This is my friend, Father Brown," said Flambeau. "I've often wanted you to meet him. Splendid weather, this; a little cold for southerners like me."

"Yes, I think it will keep clear," said Angus, sitting down on a violet-striped Eastern ottoman.

"No," said the priest quietly, "it has begun to snow."

And, indeed, as he spoke, the first few flakes, foreseen by the man of chestnuts, began to drift across the darkening window-pane.

"Well," said Angus heavily. "I'm afraid I've come on business, and rather jumpy business at that. The fact is, Flambeau, within a stone's throw of your house is a fellow who badly wants your help; he's perpetually being haunted and threatened by an invisible enemy—a scoundrel whom nobody has ever seen." As Angus proceeded to tell the whole tale of Smythe and Welkin, beginning with Laura's story, and going on with his own, the supernatural laugh at the corner of two empty streets, the strange distinct words spoken in an empty room, Flambeau grew more and more vividly concerned, and the little priest seemed to be left out of it, like a piece of furniture. When it came to the scribbled stamp-paper pasted on the window, Flambeau rose, seeming to fill the room with his huge shoulders.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I think you had better tell me the rest on the nearest road to this man's house. It strikes me, somehow, that there is no time to be lost."

"Delighted," said Angus, rising also, "though he's safe enough for the present, for I've set four men to watch the only hole to his burrow."

They turned out into the street, the small priest trundling after them with the docility of a small dog. He merely said, in a cheerful way, like one making conversation: "How quick the snow gets thick on the ground."

¶

AS they threaded the steep side-streets already powdered with silver, Angus finished his story; and by the time they reached the crescent with the towering flats, he had leisure to turn his attention to the four sentinels. The chestnut seller, both before and after receiving a sovereign, swore stubbornly that he had watched the door and seen no visitor enter. The policeman was even more emphatic. He said he had had experience of crooks of all kinds, in top-hats and in rags; he wasn't so green as to expect suspicious characters to look suspicious; he looked out for anybody and, so help him, there had been nobody. And when all three men gathered round the gilded commissionaire, who still stood smiling astride of the porch, the verdict was more final still.

"I've got a right to ask any man, duke

or dustman, what he wants in these flats," said the genial and gold-laced giant, "and I'll swear there's been nobody to ask since this gentleman went away."

The unimportant Father Brown, who stood back, looking modestly at the pavement, here ventured to say meekly: "Has nobody been up and down stairs, then, since the snow began to fall? It began while we were all round at Flambeau's."

"Nobody's been in here, sir, you can take it from me," said the official, with beaming authority.

"Then I wonder what that is?" said the priest, and stared at the ground blankly like a fish.

The others all looked down also; and Flambeau used a fierce exclamation and a French gesture. For it was unquestionably true that down the middle of the entrance guarded by the man in gold lace, actually between the arrogant, stretched legs of that colossus, ran a stringy pattern of grey footprints stamped upon the white snow.

"God!" cried Angus involuntarily. "The Invisible Man!"

Without another word he turned and dashed up the stairs, with Flambeau following; but Father Brown still stood looking about him in the snow-clad street as if he had lost interest in his query.

Flambeau was plainly in a mood to break down the door with his big shoulder; but the Scotsman, with more reason, if less intuition, fumbled about on the frame of the door till he found the invisible button; and the door swung slowly open.

It showed substantially the same serried interior; the hall had grown darker, though it was still struck here and there with the last crimson shafts of sunset, and one or two of the headless machines had been moved from their places for this or that purpose, and stood here and there about the twilit place. The green and red of their coats were all darkened in the dusk; and their likeness to human shapes slightly increased by their very shapelessness. But in the middle of them all, exactly where the paper with the red ink had lain, there lay something that looked very like red ink spilt out of its bottle. But it was not red ink.

With a French combination of reason and violence, Flambeau simply said: "Murder!" and, plunging into the flat, had explored every corner and cupboard of it in five minutes. But if he expected to find a corpse he found none. Isidore Smythe simply was not in the place, either dead or alive. After the most tearing search the two men met each other in the outer hall, with streaming faces and staring eyes. "My friend," said Flambeau, talking French in his excitement, "not only is your murderer invisible, but he makes invisible, also, the murdered man."

Angus looked round at the dim room full of dummies, and in some Celtic corner of his Scotch soul a shudder started. One of the life-size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned, perhaps, by the slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms was a little lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy that poor Smythe's own iron child had struck him down. Matter had rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But, even so, what had they done with him?

"Eaten him?" said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork.

He recovered his mental health by an emphatic effort, and said to Flambeau: "Well, there it is. The poor fellow has evaporated like a cloud and left a red streak on the floor. The tale does not belong to this world."

"There is only one thing to be done," said Flambeau, "whether it belongs to this world or the other—I must go down and talk to my friend."

They descended, passing the man with the pail, who again asseverated that he had let no intruder pass, down to the commissionaire and the hovering chestnut man, who rigidly reasserted their own watchfulness. But when Angus looked round for his fourth confirmation he could not see it, and called out with some nervousness: "Where is the policeman?"

"I beg your pardon," said Father Brown; "that is my fault. I just sent him down the road to investigate something—that I just thought worth investigating."

"Well, we want him back pretty soon," said Angus abruptly, "for the wretched man upstairs has not only been murdered, but wiped out."

"How?" asked the priest.

"Father," said Flambeau, after a pause, "upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe

has entered the house, but Smythe is gone, as if stolen by the fairies. If that is not supernatural, I——"

As he spoke, they were all checked by an unusual sight; the big blue policeman came round the corner of the crescent, running. He came straight up to Brown.

"You're right, sir," he panted, "they've just found poor Mr. Smythe's body in the canal down below."

Angus put his hand wildly to his head. "Did he run down and drown himself?" he asked.

"He never came down, I'll swear," said the constable, "and he wasn't drowned either, for he died of a great stab over the heart."

"And yet you saw no one enter?" said Flambeau in a grave voice.

"Let us walk down the road a little," said the priest.

As they reached the other end of the crescent, he observed abruptly: "Stupid of me! I forgot to ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light-brown sack."

"Why a light-brown sack?" asked Angus, astonished.

"Because, if it was any other coloured sack, the case must begin over again," said Father Brown; "but if it was a light-brown sack—why, the case is finished."

"I am pleased to hear it," said Angus with hearty irony. "It hasn't begun, so far as I am concerned."

"You must tell us all about it," said Flambeau with a strange heavy simplicity, like a child.

¶

UNCONSCIOUSLY they were walking with quickening steps down the long sweep of road on the other side of the high crescent, Father Brown leading briskly, though in silence. At last he said with an almost touching vagueness: "Well, I'm afraid you'll think it so prosy. We always begin at the abstract end of things, and you can't begin this story anywhere else.

"Have you ever noticed this—that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean—or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house: 'Is anybody staying with you?' the lady doesn't answer: 'Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlourmaid, and so on,' though the parlourmaid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says: 'There is *nobody* staying with us,' meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks: 'Who is staying in the house?' then the lady will remember the butler, parlourmaid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that *no man* had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him."

"An invisible man?" inquired Angus, raising his red eyebrows.

"A mentally invisible man," said Father Brown.

A minute or two after, he resumed in the same unassuming voice, like a man thinking his way. "Of course, you can't think of such a man until you do think of him. That's where his cleverness comes in. But I came to think of him through two or three little things in the tale Mr. Angus told us. First, there was the fact that this Welkin went for long walks. And then there was the vast lot of stamp-paper on the window. And then, most of all there were the two things the young lady said—things that couldn't be true. Don't get annoyed," he added hastily, noting a sudden movement of the Scotsman's head; "she thought they were true all right, but they couldn't be true. A person *can't* be quite alone in a street a second before she receives a letter. She can't be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near her; he must be mentally invisible."

"Why must there be somebody near her?" asked Angus.

"Because," said Father Brown, "barring carrier-pigeons, somebody must have brought her the letter."

"Do you really mean to say," asked Flambeau, with energy, "that Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady?"

"Yes," said the priest. "Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady. You see, he had to."

"Oh, I can't stand much more of this," exploded Flambeau. "Who is this fellow?

What does he look like. What is the usual get-up of a mentally invisible man ? "

" He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold," replied the priest promptly, with precision, " and in this striking, and even showy, costume he entered Himylaya Mansions under eight human eyes ; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down into the street again carrying the dead body in his arms——"

" Reverend sir," cried Angus, standing still, " are you raving mad, or am I ? "

" You are not mad," said Brown " only a little unobservant. You have not noticed such a man as this, for example."

He took three quick strides forward, and put his hand on the shoulder of an ordinary passing postman who had bustled by them unnoticed under the shade of the trees.

" Nobody hardly ever notices postmen, somehow," he said thoughtfully ; " yet they have passions like other men, and even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily."

The postman, instead of turning naturally, had ducked and tumbled against the garden fence. He was a lean, fair-bearded man of very ordinary appearance—but, as he turned an alarmed face over his shoulder, all three men were fixed with an almost fiendish squint.

Flambeau went back to his sabres, purple rugs and Persian cat, having many things to attend to. John Turnbull Angus went back to the lady at the shop, with whom that imprudent young man contrives to be extremely comfortable. But Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known.

# New Lamps for Old

YOUTH has brave and splendid fires of swiftly-blazing wonder,
Fires that only kindle once, that old men cannot share.
Yet in this small wayside inn, we watch the red glow under
Peat-sods, with their showering sparks, and find our visions there.

Alps and sanctuaries lure their untried feet to wander
Fresh adventures gathering, the wide horizons o'er.
Strange, that in the candle-gleam we see reflected yonder
All the heart of life is framed within a cottage door !

Voices from the wilderness, and from the dim grey reaches
Of the desert-lands of earth, they call forlorn and clear.
Now on dusty sun-flecked roads, beneath the golden beeches,
Children's voices leaving school are those we crave to hear.

Flowers we had a-many once, and sweet romance among them,
Myrtle, too, and meadow-sweet ; austere victorious palm.
Pluck we now from wayside walls where kindly life has hung them
Golden-branching memories, and lavender, and balm.

Destinies we dreamed were ours ; a world was in the making ;
Hopes like blazing beacons then lit all the sky with red.
Now before the nearer Dark, one small sure candle taking,
Unafraid, we climb the stair, and so in peace to bed.

RUTHERFORD CROCKETT.

# Little Speck in Garnered Fruit

*Concerning the humours of a peach proposition*

By O. HENRY

THE honeymoon was at its full. There was a flat with the reddest of new carpets, tasselled portieres and six steins with pewter lids arranged on a ledge above the wainscoting of the dining-room. The wonder of it was yet upon them. Neither of them had ever seen a yellow primrose by the river's brim; but if such a sight had met their eyes at that time it would have seemed like—well, whatever the poet expected the right kind of people to see in it besides a primrose.

The bride sat in the rocker with her feet resting upon the world. She was wrapt in rosy dreams and a kimono of the same hue. She wondered what the people in Greenland and Tasmania and Beloochistan were saying one to another about her marriage to Kid McGarry. Not that it made any difference. There was no welter-weight from London to the Southern Cross that could stand up four hours—no; four rounds—with her bridegroom. And he had been hers for three weeks; and the crook of her little finger could sway him more than the fist of any 142-pounder in the world.

Love, when it is ours, is the other name for self-abnegation and sacrifice. When it belongs to people across the airshaft it means arrogance and self-conceit.

The bride crossed her Oxfords and looked thoughtfully at the distemper Cupids on the ceiling.

"Precious," said she, with the air of Cleopatra asking Antony for Rome done up in tissue paper and delivered at residence, "I think I would like a peach."

Kid McGarry arose and put on his coat and hat. He was serious, shaven, sentimental, and spry.

"All right," said he, as coolly as though he were only agreeing to sign articles to fight the champion of England. "I'll step down and cop one out for you—see?"

"Don't be long," said the bride. "I'll be lonesome without my naughty boy. Get a nice, ripe one."

After a series of farewells that would have befitted an imminent voyage to foreign parts, the Kid went down to the street.

Here he not unreasonably hesitated, for the season was yet early spring, and there seemed small chance of wresting anywhere from those chill streets and stores the coveted luscious guerdon of summer's golden prime.

At the Italian's fruit-stand on the corner he stopped and cast a contemptuous eye over the display of papered oranges, highly polished apples and wan, sun-hungry bananas.

"Gotta da peach?" asked the Kid in the tongue of Dante, the lover of lovers.

"Ah, no," sighed the vendor. "Not for one mont com-a da peach. Too soon. Gotta da nice-a orange. Like-a da orange?"

Scornful, the Kid pursued his quest. He entered the all-night chop-house, cafe, and bowling-alley of his friend and admirer, Justus O'Callahan. The O'Callahan was about in his institution, looking for leaks.

"I want it straight," said the Kid to him. "The old woman has got a hunch that she wants a peach. Now, if you've got a peach, Cal, get it out quick. I want it and others like it if you've got 'em in plural quantities."

"The house is yours," said O'Callahan. "But there's no peach in it. It's too soon. I don't suppose you could even find 'em at one of the Broadway joints. That's too bad. When a lady fixes her mouth for a certain kind of fruit nothing else won't do. It's too late now to find any of the first-class fruiterers open. But if you think the missis would like some nice oranges, I've just got a box of fine ones in that she might——"

"Much obliged, Cal. It's a peach proposition right from the ring of the gong. I'll try farther."

The time was nearly midnight as the Kid walked down the West-Side avenue. Few stores were open, and such as were practically hooted at the idea of a peach.

But in her moated flat the bride confidently awaited her Persian fruit. A champion welter-weight not find a peach? —not stride triumphantly over the seasons and the zodiac and the almanac to fetch an Amsden's June or a Georgia Cling to his owny-own?

The Kid's eye caught sight of a window that was lighted and gorgeous with Nature's most entrancing colours. The light suddenly went out. The Kid sprinted and caught the fruiterer locking his door.

"Peaches?" said he, with extreme deliberation.

"Well, no, sir. Not for three or four weeks yet. I haven't any idea where you might find some. There may be a few in town from under the glass, but they'd be hard to locate. Maybe at one of the more expensive hotels—some place where there's plenty of money to waste. I've got some very fine oranges, though—from a shipload that came in to-day."

The Kid lingered on the corner for a moment, and then set out briskly toward a pair of green lights that flanked the steps of a building down a dark side street.

"Captain around anywhere?" he asked of the desk sergeant of the police station.

At that moment the Captain came briskly forward from the rear. He was in plain clothes, and had a busy air.

"Hello, Kid," he said to the pugilist. "Thought you were bridal-touring?"

"Got back yesterday. I'm a solid citizen now. Think I'll take an interest in municipal doings. How would it suit you to get into Denver Dick's place to-night, Cap?"

"Past performances," said the Captain, twisting his moustache. "Denver was closed up two months ago."

"Correct," said the Kid. "Rafferty chased him out of the Forty-third. He's running in your precinct now, and his game's bigger than ever. I'm down on this gambling business. I can put you against his game."

"In my precinct?" growled the Captain. "Are you sure, Kid? I'll take it as a favour. Have you got the entrée? How is it to be done?"

"Hammers," said the Kid. "They haven't got any steel on the doors yet. You'll need ten men. No; they won't let me in the place. Denver has been trying to do me. He thought I tipped him off for the other raid. I didn't though. You want to hurry. I've got to get back home. The house is only three blocks from here."

Before ten minutes had sped the Captain with a dozen men stole with their guide into the hallway of a dark and virtuous-looking building in which many businesses were conducted by day.

"Third floor, rear," said the Kid, softly. "I'll lead the way."

Two axemen faced the door that he pointed out to them.

"It seems all quiet," said the Captain, doubtfully. "Are you sure your tip is straight?"

"Cut away!" said the Kid. "It's on me if it ain't."

The axes crashed through the as yet unprotected door. A blaze of light from within poured through the smashed panels. The door fell, and the raiders sprang into the room with their guns handy.

The big room was furnished with the gaudy magnificence dear to Denver Dick's western ideas. Various well-patronised games were in progress. About fifty men who were in the room rushed upon the police in a grand break for personal liberty. The plain-clothes men had to do a little club-swinging. More than half the patrons escaped.

¶

DENVER DICK had graced his game with his own presence that night. He led the rush that was intended to sweep away the smaller body of raiders. But when he saw the Kid his manner became personal. Being in the heavy-weight class, he cast himself joyfully upon his slighter enemy, and they rolled down a flight of stairs in each other's arms. On the landing they separated and arose, and then the Kid was able to use some of his professional tactics, which had been useless to him while in the excited clutch of a 200-pound sporting gentleman who was about to lose $20,000 worth of paraphernalia.

After vanquishing his adversary, the Kid hurried upstairs and through the gambling-room into a smaller apartment connecting by an arched doorway.

Here was a long table set with choicest chinaware and silver, and lavishly furnished with food of that expensive and spectacular sort of which the devotees of sport are supposed to be fond. Here again was to be perceived the liberal and florid taste of the gentleman with the urban cognomenal prefix.

## Little Speck in Garnered Fruit

A No. 10 patent leather shoe protruded a few of its inches outside the tablecloth along the floor. The Kid seized this, and plucked forth a black man in a white tie and the garb of a servitor.

"Get up!" commanded the Kid. "Are you in charge of this free lunch?"

"Yes, sah, I was. Has they done pinched us ag'in, boss?"

"Looks that way. Listen to me. Are there any peaches in this layout? If there ain't I'll have to throw up the sponge."

"There was three dozen, sah, when the game opened this evenin'; but I reckon the gentlemen done eat 'em all up. If you'd like to eat a fust-rate orange, sah, I kin find you some."

"Get busy," ordered the Kid, sternly, "and move whatever peach crop you've got quick, or there'll be trouble. If anybody oranges me again to-night, I'll knock his face off."

The raid on Denver Dick's high-priced and prodigal luncheon revealed one lone, last peach that had escaped the epicurean jaws of the followers of chance. Into the Kid's pocket it went, and that indefatigable forager departed immediately with his prize. With scarcely a glance at the scene on the sidewalk below, where the officers were loading their prisoners into the patrol wagons, he moved homeward with long, swift strides.

His heart was light as he went. So rode the knights back to Camelot after perils and high deeds done for their ladies fair. The Kid's lady had commanded him and he had obeyed. True, it was but a peach that she had craved; but it had been no small deed to glean a peach at midnight from that wintry city where yet the February snows lay like iron. She had asked for a peach; she was his bride; in his pocket the peach was warming in his hand that held it for fear that it might fall out and be lost.

On the way the Kid turned in at an all-night drug store and said to the spectacled clerk:

"Say, sport, I wish you'd size up this rib of mine and see if it's broke. I was in a little scrap, and bumped down a flight or two of stairs."

The druggist made an examination.

"It isn't broken," was his diagnosis; "but you have a bruise there that looks like you'd fallen off the Flatiron twice."

"That's all right," said the Kid. "Let's have your clothes-brush, please."

The bride waited in the rosy glow of the pink lamp-shade. The miracles were not all passed away. By breathing a desire for some slight thing—a flower, a pomegranate, a—oh, yes, a peach—she could send forth her man into the night, into the world which could not withstand him, and he would do her bidding.

And now he stood by her chair and laid the peach in her hand.

"Naughty boy!" she said, fondly. "Did I say a peach? I think I would much rather have had an orange."

Blest be the bride.

# THE ARGOSY VOTING COMPETITION

WE again offer two prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the readers who send in the titles of the four best stories in the order of merit which most nearly coincides with the votes of the majority. Stories must be selected from this issue. The Editor's decision will be final.

Entries should be made on postcards addressed to: "Vote," THE ARGOSY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4 (Comp.), and sent in by October 28, 1927. The result will be announced in THE ARGOSY for JANUARY, on sale December 2, 1927.

We have pleasure in awarding a prize of Two Guineas to Miss I. C. BROWN, 49, Comely Bank Road, Edinburgh; and a prize of One Guinea to Miss E. M. PASKINS, Naghan Lodge, Seaforde, Co. Down, Ireland— as the result of the competition for September.

*A Brilliant New Three-Part Novel*

# Black Roses

*A vivid and picturesque romance of Neapolitan life*

**By FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG**

## PART III

### Previous Chapters

A VISIT to Naples recalls to Paolo Ricci, a fashionable portrait painter, certain romantic episodes of his past life.

Paolo was born in a village among the Neapolitan vineyards of peasant stock. His father mixed medicines for the villagers and by hard-driven bargains in land transactions gained enough money to educate his son for the medical profession.

But Paolo has other intentions; from his earliest years he has seized on anything that will gratify his passion for painting. Unwittingly he reveals his longing and the news reaches his father. Paolo's father dies of rage at the frustration of his plans.

Paolo's mother, who has sympathy with her son's aims consults Don Alessandro, Paolo's uncle, and with his aid Paolo is sent to Naples to study under Gennaro, the sculptor.

Here Paolo is lodged with Pietro Viva, a medical student who acts as Paolo's mentor and tells him of love in a queer, romantic, cynical manner and advises him to leave Gennaro's if he wishes to make his fortune.

Meanwhile his curiosity is excited by Cristina, the strange, pale woman who keeps the house and lives in fear of a coarse-featured man, nicknamed the Black Hunter, who has a sinister influence over her life.

Paolo leaves Gennaro's and after wandering in search of work finds Kalisch, a Jew dealer who commissions him to make "fake" antique boxes. Later he finds that Kalisch makes an enormous profit by selling them to a shopkeeper in the Riviera de Chiaia. Paolo then works for the shopkeeper.

Not long after this the shopkeeper tells Paolo that he must take a lower price for the work, and after a week of idleness Paolo is forced to submit. Cristina, noticing his distress, suspects that he has fallen in love, but after hearing the truth is relieved for she realises that now she is in love with him herself. One night she gives him two sheets of wonderfully illuminated parchment for making the "fake" boxes. When Paolo asks her where they came from she admits that she has stolen them from the Black Hunter.

Then one morning she tells him the story of her life. How she was taken from an orphanage for a servant by a widow and how she lived with her until the widow's death, thereupon she is turned out by the widow's daughter. While running away Cristina is caught by the Black Hunter, who, under the pretence of love, takes her to live with him.

Cristina continues her narrative.

"AFTER that day I don't think I was ever happy again: for up till then, I had been happy, Paolo. I suppose some men would have turned me out of the house. He didn't do that, thank heaven. Perhaps I was useful to him. If he'd got rid of me he'd have had to get someone else to take care of the house and have paid them for it, so it was cheaper to keep me. Sometimes he'd come and go without speaking a word. He'd look at me as if I filled him with disgust. And sometimes, if his temper was bad, he'd beat me, and leave me to cry by myself for hours and hours. And if he saw a speck of dust in the house he'd rave and say that I was lazy. I used to feel so tired, so tired.

"Although I've known him all these years I never can guess what his temper's going to be like. Sometimes, when he's tired out with hunting, he's too lazy to notice anything. At others, particularly when he's been drinking, he comes in like a lion, as ready to beat me as to look at me. Then it's hell, Paolo, hell! That's why I tremble and turn to ice when I hear him coming. You never know. One moment he's smiling; the next he treats you like dirt. I think he believes it's good to keep me frightened. And he's so jealous, too. Why, if he caught me speaking to any of the neighbours he'd flay me! When first I dared to speak to him about Viva and yourself . . . No, I won't tell you what he said . . .

"And that's my life . . . that was my life, Paolo, until you came here. Perhaps I shouldn't have told you. I wouldn't have told you all this if it hadn't been burning my heart out in the darkness. I used to watch you, at first. You were such a stranger, so different from a man like Viva. I couldn't understand you, and I wanted to understand. Because . . . somehow . . . you didn't seem to belong to this part of my life. When I was near you I seemed different; I felt like I used to feel—

And last night . . . when you kissed me . . . ."

She clung to him with closed eyes.

" No, you can't love me," she whispered. " I know it's too late for that ; and if you pity me I could die with shame. You know that I've not been asking for your pity ? Swear to me that you'll never pity me ! Once and for all ? "

She would not be satisfied till he had given his promise.

" Neither love nor pity," she said. " All that I want is that you'll not despise me, even though I deserve it : just that, and that you'll think of me kindly. As though I were your sister, Paolo : your friend and your sister. I'm not too old for that, am I, Paolo ? "

" Of course you're not, Cristina," he assured her.

" If only you knew what happiness it gives me to hear you speak my name. I'd grown to hate it ; but you make it sound beautiful. You will always call me by my name ? If only you knew what happiness these small things can give me ! So we are friends ? " she added eagerly. " Friends. Let me hear that word."

" For always, Cristina."

She sighed luxuriously. " Paolo, we shall be so happy. And I shall help you, and you'll know why, and never question me ? " She pointed to the parchments lying on the table. " In little things like this, that can hurt nobody and give your poor Cristina so much joy ? "

He could not answer her.

" You need not be frightened," she persuaded. " I am the only one who need be frightened, and I am not afraid any longer."

Still he was obstinately silent.

" And if your conscience troubles you," she said, " we'll find a way to soothe it. Listen, Paolo. I cannot see you starve and go thin like this. You took the others from me : why not take these ? When you have made your boxes, you will have money. Isn't that so ? And with the money we'll buy others and replace them. You see, you see ? Isn't that a splendid plan ? Nobody need ever know how wicked we've been. Only you and me. Why did we never think of that before ? How stupid we've been ! "

She was so gay and breathless with the magnificence of her stratagem that he could not refuse her. " If that is understood . . ." he began.

" Of course it's understood, my foolish child. The time we've wasted over these tiny scruples ! But now it's over, and you will work, and I shall be watching you, and both of us will live happily for ever and ever." She paused and lifted her eyes to his with an appealing shyness. " And sometimes," she whispered, " Paolo, you will kiss me ? "

That kiss, so timidly demanded, and almost grudgingly bestowed out of the pity which Cristina had begged him not to give her, set a seal upon the contract of conspiracy to which Paolo now found himself committed.

¶

NOW, every morning, when Viva had gone to his hospital and Paolo sat alone at breakfast, tenderly brooding over his unfinished canvas, Cristina would glide, as silent as any ghost, into the room. This was the hour for which she lived, the hour that Paolo dreaded, and hated himself for dreading. Cristina entered timidly, like a shy animal, that experience has taught to be wary of unexpected blows. When she saw him rapt in the contemplation of his work she dared not speak, for his art, as always, remained a mystery to her.

" I am afraid you have not slept," she would whisper. " Paolo, what can I do with you. You work so hard. Last night I came upstairs and listened outside the door. You were still working—don't deny it—long after midnight. I know you are overworking yourself. Your eyes are all black and sunken. Why won't you listen to me ? Why should you work yourself to death ? "

" Because at night I am a tradesman, Cristina," he said. " My painting is a luxury for which I have to pay since no one else will pay me for it. Canvas and paint costs money. To-day I must start on a new set of boxes."

He spoke the last words with an uneasy laugh, to conceal from himself the shame that was hidden in them. Even at this stage his weakness would not allow him to be honest with himself. It was not in her nature to acquiesce in this language of hidden meanings, although her mind was sensitive to understand them.

" What ? Are they finished ? " she said. " How careless of me to have forgotten ! " Then she would slip her wooden clogs from

her feet, stealing, bare-footed and cautious, to the attic above, returning, breathless, with the parchment sheets that she had taken from her master's store.

"These are all right?" she always anxiously asked him.

Meanwhile, not only in the impetus that renewed prosperity had given to his art but in the comforts which it provided, these were halcyon days. Viva, whose spirits had grown wilted under poverty like a tropical tree transported to a temperate clime, burst out again into his native efflorescence. The change in their condition was so sudden that he couldn't be satisfied until it was explained to him.

"Why, in heaven's name be so mysterious about it, Paolo?" he said. "If it's true that you've made a compact with the devil, for heaven's sake confess it, so that I can prepare myself to face the final reckoning. Or if you've been cutting throats for the camorra, let me protect myself by making friends with the police."

He laughed at Paolo. It was their habit to chaff each other though the types of their humour were as different as German and Greek. But even while he joked, Viva's eyes, sharpened by the habit of clinical observation, were quick to notice anything unusual in Paolo's room. That night they pitched upon the latest of the parchments which Cristina had stolen. He picked them up and examined them closely. Paolo, wondering what he was after, peered over his shoulder.

"Curious . . . This is curious," Viva murmured.

Paolo had not noticed anything curious about them. Now, taught by Viva's eyes, he realised that they were different from any that he had used before. The parchment was thicker and whiter than that of the thumbed missals to which he was accustomed; its script was of an unusual character; the text in a Latin full of long and unfamiliar words; the pages numbered, continuous, flat, as if they had just been torn from a bound volume. Viva, following the letters with a pointed finger-nail, was murmuring the Latin words of the title as he deciphered them, translating as he went:

"*Regimem Sanitatis Salernitanum:* The Sanitary Regimem of Salerno. Good God, it's too good to be true! It's written in verses. You see? Rhymed couplets. Wait a moment. Let's get the dedication first. *Anglorum regi scribit schola tota Salerni:* To the king of the English the whole school of Salerno wrote. . . ." He turned to Paolo excitedly: "Good heavens, Paolo, do you realise what you've got here?"

Paolo shook his head. The school of Salerno meant nothing to him; much less the king of the English.

"Well, then, I'll tell you," Viva cried. "This is more in my province than in yours. The School of Salerno was the first School of Medicine in the world. It was founded in the twelfth century by one of the Norman dukes. Roger was his name. *Ruggiero Salernitanus.* Look, you can see for yourself. I forget the details, although I'm supposed to have learned them. Anyhow, this Roger—the first great patron of medicine, mind you, in Europe—decided to collect and record all the medical science of his time. All the physicians of the middle ages gathered at his court.

"Constantine Africanus came from Carthage. Mesue, too, an Arab—the great authority on antidotes. Useful, as you can imagine, in those days! All this accumulation of wisdom was summarised in the *Regimem.* I seem to remember that copies of it exist in some museum. Copies! But this . . . who knows, Paolo, if this sheet that I hold in my hand isn't the first page—the first three pages of the original?" He shook Paolo's arm. "Lord! What's the matter with you? Are you so wrapped up in your damned painting that you don't see the importance of this? Don't you realise, my poor dear fool, that if you could find the rest of it it would fetch a million? There isn't a moment to lose. Where did you find it?"

Paolo found himself hedging. In spite of Viva's intimacy, he hesitated to reveal his infamous contract with Cristina.

"It's difficult to remember," he said.

"Difficult? But you must remember!" Viva cried. "A discovery like this would set the whole of scientific Europe on fire. It would make a millionaire of you. Look at these sheets! I'd swear that they've been torn from a bound book. If you tramped Naples for a month and visited every shop where you've bought parchment, it'd be worth your while. Pull yourself together; forget your silly daubs and set to work at once!"

Through all the rest of the evening Viva went flaming on, girding at Paolo's guilty placidity, planning the extravagances in

which the million of money should be spent. By bedtime, in spite of the shame which made him feel like a felon, his imagination had taken fire from Viva's. As soon as he was alone in his own room the visionary millions expended itself in channels of which Viva would never have dreamed. The whole world opened out before him. He was not only an artist, but a wealthy patron of art. He fingered the magic pages; he gazed at them reverently, as if their virtue were talismanic.

The arrival of Cristina with a carafe of water brought him to earth. Still shaken by his visions he approached her.

"Cristina!" She turned timidly. "These parchments. Where did you get them from?"

"From the same place as the others," she told him; "from the attic. I took the first that came to my hand; I didn't dare to stay long. Why, what is the matter with them? If they won't do, I'll change them."

"There's nothing the matter with them. On the contrary, I find them unusually interesting." Her puzzled eyes cleared with thankfulness. "I want you to try and remember," he continued, repressing the emotion which unsteadied his voice, "exactly where you found them."

She raised her head helplessly: "I cannot remember," she said.

"But you must . . . you must!" he persisted. "At least you can remember if there were others like them?"

"No, no. I've told you. I took the first."

"You tore them, separated them from a book?"

"Paolo, it's no good asking me. When I'm up there I'm so frightened that I don't know what I'm doing, much less remember. Besides, the attic is dark. The dark terrifies me. It feels as if it were full of spirits."

"Cristina, you're talking like a baby. You, a grown woman! It's ridiculous. Close your eyes; imagine yourself in the attic, and try to remember again."

She obeyed him, mechanically, for a moment. "No, Paolo, it's no good. I can't, I can't," she told him.

He would not be beaten. "You have the key?" She felt for it in her apron pocket. "Then you must take a light and go and look for me. Examine these carefully. Try to remember what they're like. All I must know, for the present, is if there are many others of the same kind."

She gazed at the leaves which he held before her. There was no recognition in her eyes. Out of shame, or sheer reluctance, she was silent.

"You can remember?" he urged her.

She shook her head. "I know that I shall not remember. Paolo"—she hesitated—"you see, I cannot read. Once, I could read a little; I'm afraid I've forgotten it."

"Then I must go with you myself," he declared.

"You, Paolo?" she cried. "Oh, never, never——"

"Why? I'm not frightened of spirits," he assured her.

"Never," she repeated. "You don't know what I suffer when I go there. Like a mouse. That is the one room that he's concerned about. Nobody, he says, must ever go near it. Such threats! When he gave me the key he said he'd cut my throat like a pig's if ever I went near. You laugh, but you don't know him. He meant what he said. Supposing he came. He might come and find us there together any moment. We should be caught; we couldn't escape him. His strength . . . you've no idea of it. Those long arms, they're like steel. Those hands. . . ." She shuddered and clasped her own. "Why, he could crack us like two walnuts in his fingers!"

As she spoke, her eyes stared, her face grew white with terror. By this time Paolo was too fiercely wrought with eagerness to let her go. He took her in his arms, half out of pity for her distress, half hoping that he might persuade her.

"What I ask you is nothing," he told her. "It's useless to explain. All that I want, since you can't help me, is to see for myself. No harm will be done. I've no intention of damaging his property. As for the danger—I'm sure you exaggerate it. Come now, I shall be with you."

She shivered violently. "I'm frightened, I'm frightened!" she whispered.

It seemed that, whatever he said, he could not reassure her. Suddenly, as if, in a silent struggle, her fears had resolved themselves, she put her face to his and kissed his lips.

"Paolo," she said, "there is nothing that I would not do for you, not even this. Let us go at once."

"Cristina, you're splendid!" he cried. He was flushed with triumph. "First, a light."

He took a candle from the table. She

watched him solemnly. The calm anguish of martyrdom was in her face. He put his arm about her. Together they passed on to the landing and up the narrowed stairs. She went beside him lifelessly, like a martyr going to the stake. Outside the attic door they stopped.

"The key?" he whispered eagerly.

She produced it. Her hand shook; she fumbled as it approached the lock. "The candle . . . nearer!" she whispered. But, as she spoke, they heard, in the dark pit of the staircase beneath them, the sound of a hand of iron beating on the lowest door. Uneasy movements. A harsh voice roared: "Cristina!" Before the echoes of the knocking had died away she had blown out the candle; she was gone. Like a moth, like a ghost, she fluttered down the stairs. New echoes floated upward. The black hunter was cursing her, asking her where the hell she'd been. He grunted; his voice rasped like iron.

Paolo heard Cristina answer him with a nervous laugh. Her voice was strange to him, the voice of another woman; there were tones in it, cavernously magnified by echoes, that he had never heard before. The door of the basement opened and slammed behind them. Paolo, his hands and forehead stony cold with sweat, clung to the attic staircase with the reek of the extinguished tallow in his nostrils.

¶

THAT night he could not sleep for the thought of Cristina; Christina's softness, bruised in the iron bands of the black hunter's arms. Imagination reinforced his vision of her courage, the reality of the danger that she had courted for his sake. He was ashamed to think that he had imposed this test upon her for the sake of Viva's million; beside the baseness of the kiss with which she had yielded to him, the baseness of all their other kisses, shameful as they were, seemed negligible. To hell with Viva and his million! To hell with all the visionary ambitions that he had built upon it. The Codex of Salerno, if it existed, might rot in the attic for ever, for all he cared. He had a feeling that Viva's enthusiasms had betrayed him into a cruel, a monstrous meanness. God knew he was despicable enough already. The realization of this last infamy determined him to be done with all the rest.

It was easier to make such resolution in the solitude of night than to perform them. Cristina knocked at his door to call him, then vanished. From the moment of his appearance at breakfast Viva gave him no peace.

In the evening he entered Paolo's room like a hurricane.

"What news?" he cried. "You've found them? Tell me you've found them!"

Paolo shook his head.

"It's no good, Pietro: a waste of time to search for them."

"A waste of time? The greatest archæological and scientific discovery of the age? You'd better come along with me to hospital. Your brain must be softened. At any rate, you've done your best to track them down?"

He went on so persistently with his badgering and Paolo found himself in such a network of palpable prevarications that, by the time they reached the dinner table, he knew that he must show his hand.

"It's no use, Pietro," he said at last. "I didn't buy them. I know where they came from; but if I tell you, it's understood that I'm speaking in confidence."

"The condition's unfair," Viva protested. "The discovery doesn't concern us alone. It's a matter of interest to the whole scientific world."

"Last night you were talking of millions," Paolo reminded him. "But that's by the way. Unless you can give me your word that you'll keep my secret, we'll say no more about it."

For a long while Viva tried to move him with arguments and entreaties. At last, under protest, he capitulated. "Be damned to you! Have your own way!"

"Cristina gave them to me."

He was happy to have spoken. Viva had always been so frank that he hated to deceive him. Viva gaped at him:

"Cristina? The devil!" he gasped. For him there could be only one interpretation of the present's meaning. "Cristina! Who would have thought it? And you, Paolo, you sly young fox! You, who have always pretended not to notice women! Well, well, my son, I can congratulate you on your reformation, but hardly—if I may be frank—upon your taste."

He made a wry mouth as he spoke that set Paolo up in arms, not so much for himself as for Cristina.

" And what the devil do you mean by that ? " he flared.

" Cristina is not . . . attractive," Viva sneered.

" Cristina's an angel of goodness and generosity," Paolo cried. " I'll thank you to leave her alone. You make me sick, Pietro, the way you talk about women."

" With all the will in the world," Viva laughingly assured him. " As I've just suggested, she isn't . . . But apparently you resent such words ? "

" I do," said Paolo hotly. " On your lips I certainly resent it. You forget that I had the pleasure—no, I won't call it that—of seeing you pursue her, and seeing her turn you down. You're like the fox, Pietro, who said that the grapes were sour."

For a moment Viva flushed darkly, then quickly recovered his mocking, sly good-humour, and burst out laughing.

" Paolo, your innocence is inimitable. I think you'd mop up everything a woman told you. As for Cristina . . well, we won't go into details.. Why, months before you came here . . ."

Paolo jumped to his feet.

" You're lying, Pietro. That is a damned lie ! "

Viva went white with anger ; " A lie ? I don't allow you to speak to me like that ! By God, you shall answer for it ! "

" A lie," Paolo repeated. In that moment he hated his friend more than anyone on earth. The pallid, smiling face of Viva was that of his enemy. Above the scattered dinner table they stared at each other. It seemed that in an instant, they must be at each other's throats. The door opened. Cristina entered. She looked from one to the other with a bewilderment that quickly turned to terror, so much she knew and dreaded the violence of men.

" I thought you had finished," she began ; but neither answered her. " Paolo," she cried, " tell me, what is the matter ? "

He was too hot to answer ; but Viva quickly tumbled to the ludicrousness of the situation. The colour came back to his cheeks ; he excused himself with a laugh. " An unimportant difference of opinion. The question of a lady," he said maliciously. " Paolo has challenged my opinion. I withdraw. I apologize."

" If you had not apologized," Paolo muttered . . .

" Paolo ? A woman ? " Cristina spoke in whisper. There was fear in her eyes.

" But I have apologized," said Viva gaily. " Come, come, I can't do more than that."

" He said . . ." Paolo began, appealing to Cristina.

" But he withdrew it," Viva interrupted, " so there's an end of the matter. Sit down, Paolo ; don't be a fool ; sit down ! "

¶

GRADUALLY Paolo's heat subsided. He allowed himself to be persuaded to take his seat. They finished their meal in a childish, unwonted silence. When Cristina had left them Viva renewed his apologies.

" It's a poor thing," he said," if old friends like ourselves should lose their tempers over Cristina. Cristina's a good woman. We'll take that for granted ; we'll imagine, to save your feelings, that her friend the black hunter doesn't exist. I wish he didn't ; he spoils the landscape."

" He's spoiled her life," said Paolo intensely. " Pietro, if you knew . . ."

" I don't, my friend, and I don't want to. We'll talk no more of Cristina. You speak as if you were in love with her . . . ."

" Pietro, you don't understand me," he protested.

" No ? Then I'm disappointed. I still had hopes. We'll avoid the subject in future and spare your tender, your too tender feelings. What interests me is the way in which she's shown her fancy. The parchments. Where did she get them from ? "

" From our black friend," Paolo confessed.

" *Dio mio !* The black hunter ? Don't tell me that he's a connoisseur ! He doesn't look like one. I'm puzzled."

" Yes, it's fantastic. I can't help you. And neither can Cristina, unless it's that she's afraid to speak."

" Is this just an accident, or are there more ? "

" The attic's crammed with them ; so many that he couldn't possibly miss what she's given me already."

" Inexplicable ! The rest of that codex under this roof ! I feel as if we were mad." He ran his fingers through his hair. " But that simplifies everything," he went on triumphantly. " Cristina will find them for us."

" I shall not ask her ; it isn't fair to her."

" As fair as what you let her do before," Viva scoffed.

" That is all over. She's suffered enough frights already."

" If you're resolved to be a fool, I'll ask her myself."

Paolo flushed : " I forbid you to do so, Pietro "

" It was I who discovered them, under your very nose. What right have you to forbid me ? "

" You've given me your word.

" Like the idiot that I was But can't you see, as I've told you before, that it's a public concern ? Have you no vestige of imagination ? " He rose to his feet and walked the room, waving his arms, transported by the fervour of his own oratory. Paolo remained as stubborn as ever. " There's not a mule in Naples as obstinate as you are," Viva cried. " All this stupidity to protect Cristina ! "

Paolo agreed.

" And yet you say you're not in love with her ! "

Paolo laughed : " Not in the least."

" Cold-blooded as a snake. But I've not finished with you. Before the week's out I'll make you see reason."

" You can try," said Paolo. " For the present you're wasting breath."

Gradually Viva's excitement subsided. Now his eager imagination fastened on the problem of the black hunter's storeroom.

" It's a strange house," said Viva, " but this beats everything. Nobody that I've talked to seems to know who he is. They call him *Don Animale*—which is picturesque and accurate. But the store of parchments ? An attic full of them ? What shall we call it ? Medically, perhaps, a monomania. God knows : there are strange things in medicine ! But in any case, my dear Paolo, we'll talk no more about it, or I shall start quarrelling with you again. You have quite forgiven me ? You don't want me to repeat my apologies ? "

They shook hands upon it. It was beyond Paolo's power to quarrel for long with Viva. He even consented to join in drinking Cristina's health. " Another bottle to celebrate the occasion," Viva insisted.

" But, my God ! " he exclaimed suddenly, " if I haven't forgotten to tell you the news. Cholera in Naples ! Five or six deaths have been reported at the hospital this afternoon. A fulminating type. One moment you're laughing ; the next you're dead."

" That sounds cheerful," Paolo laughed " But what has it got to do with us ? "

" In Rome, or Paris, or London you might afford to laugh," Viva told him , " but here, no. Naples is like no other city in Europe. We pay no attention to sanitary laws. Ordinarily we get on very well without them ; we're the only example of a free people in civilization ; but when it comes to a pest of this kind, in summer, we may have to pay for our freedom ; we're as much at its mercy as any rabbit-warren in China. Where does our water come from ? Foul wells. God knows where the water gets into them. Cholera, some authorities say, is a disease of water . . ."

" Thank heaven *you're* safe, Pietro ! " Paolo interrupted.

But Viva was too professional to see the joke.

" We're none of us safe," he declared. " What do they wash our food in ? "

" Damned little, as far as I can see," Paolo scoffed.

" Try, for one moment, to be serious. Think of the fruit and salads that are on the table. The wells in this place are as rotten as the Roman Empire. The rats that live in them go out foraging in the *fondaci* at night. The people who live in the *fondaci !* I tell you, Paolo, Naples is two cities : one on the top, the pleasant place in which we divert ourselves ; another underneath, in which you and I wouldn't dare to poke our noses. Riddled, like an ant-heap. Rags and rats and filth : unspeakable sub-human abominations ! "

" But if cholera comes from water, what has that to do with it ? "

" Everything. You artists are incapable of logical thought. If you can't see it, I won't explain to you. But even if cholera doesn't come from water—nobody really knows, though some German (Koch's his name) has just discovered an organism—one thing's pretty clear, and that is : if cholera once gets into the *fondaci*, why, God help Naples ! Nothing but gutting by fire would clear it out, at this time of year. You mark my words ! However, it may be only a scare. In any case, I thought it my duty to warn you."

" A thousand thanks," said Paolo carelessly. " How well I know you, Pietro ! You doctors are never so happy as when you're freezing our blood ; and on a torrid night like this . . ."

He stood at the window, watching pale lightning that washed the dense sky above the Sorrentine mountains, throwing into

ominous relief black billows of cloud that, like heralds of approaching doom, kept night-long watch over the city's sleepless coruscations. Though the night sky was jet, the stones of Naples still radiated warmth like the lining of an oven. The air was tepid on his skin; yet, as he stood there breathing it, Paolo shivered.

¶

FOR the moment Paolo had little time to think of Viva and his cholera. Even the Salerno codex no longer troubled him. Words that had passed unnoticed in the midst of the quarrel which her appearance had interrupted had fermented under the hot night, in Cristina's mind. Next morning she appeared before him, her face drawn and pallid, her eyes hollowed by sleeplessness. What cursed emotional complication she was bringing him he couldn't imagine. She did not leave him long in doubt.

"They are true," she said, "the words that Viva spoke last night?" She did not wait for his answer. "Of course they are true. If they weren't you'd have denied them. What woman is this? You must tell me, Paolo; I couldn't sleep for thinking of it."

"What woman?" He was genuinely astonished. "Cristina, for the life of me I've no idea what you're talking about. A little difference: no business of yours. I can't remember. When did we speak of women?"

"Ah, Paolo," she said wearily, "you need not lie to me. It's better that I should know. I *must* know," she continued, with increasing passion. "I have a right to know You shall not put me off like this. 'An unimportant difference of opinion; the question of a lady.' Those were Viva's words Who is she? Oh, Paolo, don't smile at me like that! This is what I've always dreaded. That Viva and his women! Can't I imagine them? Can't I tell from the way in which he has spoken to me what kind of women he frequents? And you, Paolo, who are like a child What can they give you? It's wrong, I tell you. It's a crime! Not for myself. . . will you believe that it's not for myself I'm pleading? Paolo, my little one, I'm not jealous—not really jealous. Only as a mother's jealous for her child. That's how I love you. That's why you frighten me. That's why I've lain all night in hell, thinking and thinking . . ."

She put her hands to her eyes and broke into harrowing sobs through which her words became lost and incoherent. "Paolo . for pity's sake . . before it's too late!"

He took the tragic figure in his arms and tried to comfort her.

"Cristina, Cristina! If you knew how foolish this was. You and your women! Listen! The lady in question happened to be yourself."

"Myself?" she gasped. She was laughing and crying at once. "Myself? Oh, Paolo!'

Gradually she controlled herself. "I suppose I must believe you," she said; "but that is not enough. Why should you quarrel about me? I don't understand."

His loyalty to Viva checked a natural reply; her quick suspicion leapt upon his reluctance. "I see," she said, "that means that you have told him about all that has happened between us. I know what Viva would do. He'd try to poison your mind against me."

The swiftness of her intuition staggered him. It was easily interpreted. Viva had not been merely boasting of his exploits; Viva's apology was nothing but a lie charitably invented to soothe his friend's susceptibilities; Viva and Cristina had made a fool of him; a flush of anger made him wish them both to hell. Not one of these complexities was worth a moment of work. He turned away from her impatiently.

"I've had enough of this damned nonsense," he said. "I don't know who to believe, and I don't care. Viva and you had better fight it out between yourselves. For God's sake leave me in peace!"

She didn't listen to him.

"I knew it, I knew it!" she cried "That's his revenge. Because I wouldn't look at him he tells you that he's been my lover. She clung to him in the doorway. Isn't that true?" Her passion in that moment seemed to him common and uncouth. Her presence offended him. The heat of the pitiless sky shrivelled the remains of his patience. He freed himself rudely, from her hands.

"Let me go he said. "Are you too stupid to see that I've no time for this, that I don't want you?"

The woman meant nothing to him, she

had deceived him, humiliated him; he had a right to hate her.

'Paolo," she cried, "you kill me, you crucify me! Is that how you treat my love? Listen . . . one moment! I swear to you. There's nothing, nothing in the world more pure, more holy. My body, that you despise, my heart . . ."

He slammed the door of his room behind him and locked it. In a hot fury he set himself to work. The room was a white-hot furnace. Not one of the watchful, brooding clouds of the night before was left. Out of a white sky the sun beat down upon a sea cowed and glassy, a sea that reflected light and heat as cruelly as the baked, radiant stones that made all Naples like an oven. He sat and sweated, stripped to the waist, yet consumed by the furnace-heated air and the vague resentment within him. He worked and burned. At last he threw aside his palette. There was no virtue in him; nothing but heat and frustration. He flung himself upon his bed in search of coolness and composure.

Somebody was knocking at the door.

"Who is it?" he cried, rising irritably.

"Cristina," her voice answered.

"You cannot come in," he shouted. "I am undressed."

"I must. Only for a moment. I have something for you. I'll wait."

Damning her persistence, yet moved by curiosity, he pulled on his shirt again and opened the door. She stood before him meekly with a roll of parchments. "I've brought you these," she said. "I think they are what you want."

"You needn't have bothered me like this," he said roughly. "Why didn't you say what you wanted?"

While he was speaking she slipped into the room. Now he was faced with the unpleasantness of getting rid of her, the duty of asserting his independence and his distaste. She had brought it on her own head; he need have no pity. He stood before her threateningly.

"Cristina," he said, with a quiet bitterness, "I think it's time we understood each other. Frankly, I've had enough of this. I've made a fool of myself—remember, I don't blame you for it—I've presumed upon your . . . kindness . . . in a way that has made me lose my self-respect and destroy yours as well. If this goes on I shall never get it back again as long as I live. And I can't face that. If I can't make a living honestly, why then I've got to fail and go back to Pogerola. No use complaining. I'd rather be a peasant—that's what I am—than live on false pretences on your charity. That's where we stand. And this is the end of it. Definitely. The end."

She stared at him, helplessly, like a prisoner listening to her sentence. Then, quickly, she recovered herself:

"But, Paolo, what have I done?" she whispered. "How many times have I told you that nothing will be missed?"

"As if that had anything to do with it!"

Her mind could only deal with one thing at a time. "Have I no rights? Haven't I been a slave in this house for years? What payment have I received? Before God, Paolo, I feel that I am innocent. I have done nothing wrong. My conscience tells me so. And if there is any wrong, why, as I've told you, the wrong's all mine. It's nothing to do with you. Nothing!"

He shook his head. "No, no. Even if you were right, it would make no difference. It's the rest of it, the falseness, that shames me. I will not be indebted to you. You put me under an obligation that I absolutely refuse to accept."

"There is no debt, there is no obligation," she cried fiercely. "What I have given you I've given from my heart. You cannot treat love as though it were a matter of commerce."

"In our case," he answered brutally, "there is no question of love."

"I will not believe it," she cried, 'not if you tell me so a thousand times. Can you look me in the eyes and tell me that all that has passed between us means nothing to you? Your lips, Paolo, your hands—have those been lying to me?"

"I have spoken the truth," he answered sullenly.

"I won't believe it," she repeated. "You do not know yourself; you're lying because that devil Viva has corrupted you. Your black genius; the one against which I've been fighting. What has he told you? Ah, you don't want me to know. I can guess his poison. You needn't tell me what he said. But listen, Paolo! Never in all my life—on the blood of San Gennaro I swear it—never for one moment have I loved any man but you. And you have answered my love. I have felt it. Oh, you're so simple, you don't know what love is!"

She fell at his feet; she clutched his

hands and covered them with tears and kisses. Moved by this pitiful abasement, he hardened himself the more.

"It's no good, Cristina," he muttered. "You'd better go."

He raised her to her feet, half kindly, half threatening. She could see the hard determination in his eyes.

"Paolo," she said. "I cannot go like this. If you send me away, my life . . . my poor life is over."

"You must go," he repeated.

With a pitiful gesture of despair she left him. When she had gone he stood powerless, dazed beneath the heat of noon. He was so exhausted and shaken by the effort of his own determination that he could no longer think; but when the power of thought returned to him it brought with it doubts and a sudden, bitter remorse.

The spiritual need of clearing himself was now so urgent that he almost determined to go to the basement and call her, to take back, no sooner than it was spoken, the injustice of her dismissal. Sheer prudence forced him to await another opportunity. In the meantime, as far as the swelter of the day would let him, he prepared to adjust himself to the changed conditions of life, taking stock of the pigments and canvases that he had in hand, meditating a final, intensive assault upon the callous picture-market. Amid the accumulated disorder of his table he found the sheaf of parchment that Cristina had brought him that morning. He smiled at the slyness with which she had left them there to tempt him. She didn't know, poor thing, the steel of his determination!

It was with a curious sense of relief that Paolo carried his last boxes to the shop in the Toledo that evening. He was at peace with heaven and earth and his own soul, and when, as he left the door of the house in the Vicolo de Angelis, the beggar who still kept his station at the mouth of the *fondaci* whined and stretched out his hand for alms, Paolo filled it with the coppers that lay loose in his pocket by way of thank-offering.

In the moment's early exaltation he had the feeling that all Naples shared with him the joy of a new birth; but as he left the port and climbed to the higher regions of the city, there descended on the scene a heaviness more ponderous than that of the low sky. It was the hour of the *corse*, when the café-terraces should have been crowded with black-coated business men sipping vermouth, the streets thick with a moving file of smart equipages and hired carriages; but, when he reached the city's heart, he saw that the newsboys who cried their papers, the urchins who scrambled for cigarette-ends under the drinkers' feet, were lounging, in puzzled groups, about half-empty terraces. Even in the Toledo itself, on whose narrow pavements a man must ordinarily fight his way at this hour of the evening, the same subduedness showed itself. The tradesmen stood at their doors, staring out anxiously at the street's unusual emptiness. A newsboy, staggering under his sheaf of unsold papers, brandished a copy pathetically in Paolo's face. He would not buy it—he had never bought a paper in his life—but as he glanced at the sheet he saw the one word *cholera*, many times repeated.

¶

CHOLERA! The word brought back into his mind all Viva's seriousness of the night before. He had treated the matter as a joke, and laughed at Viva; but while he had been absorbed in the satisfaction of his conscience, that little cloud had spread into a blackness that lay like the light of an eclipse on the whole city. A shameful panic, he told himself, unworthy of reasonable men. Yet, as the empty lengths of the Toledo received him, their silence and desolation undermined his spirit and made him feel that in his carelessness and scorn he was alone.

"This is ridiculous," he thought. "I am happy. I am not going to let this scare get on my nerves. I will not be afraid." But even though he was not afraid, his individual courage began to look silly and futile in its isolation.

Against the reasoned anxiety of half a million people his own exaltation had a touch of madness in it.

In the eyes of the shopkeeper who bought his boxes he first encountered fear. The man was white as chalk, clasping and unclasping nervous hands, irritably cursing the clumsiness of the workmen who were putting up his shutters.

"Too late," he cried, "you are too late. I am shutting the shop. We shall not open to-morrow. Everyone near us is doing the same. You cannot blame them;

at a time like this everyone must think for himself."

Paolo showed him the boxes he had brought. The shopman made a gesture of impotence to deal with them:

"What is the use of buying things now?" he said. "Who knows if I shall ever open this shop again? Why, in a week we may all of us be dead!"

"Surely it's not as bad as that?" Paolo suggested.

The shopman lost his temper: "You talk like a fool, a fool! You know nothing about it. Have you seen the papers this evening, or been asleep all day? As bad as that!" he grumbled. "Isn't *this* bad enough?" He held a crumpled newspaper under Paolo's eyes. "Ten cases yesterday: all in the district of the port. That's not too much, if it were anything but cholera. But look; to-day! Fifty new cases. Fifty! And forty deaths. Do you say that's nothing? If it were only among the poorer people of the port, then we might laugh at it. But it's everywhere: Chiaia, Posillipo, Vomero. Cases in the very best quarters, let me tell you, and among the very best people. This morning a senator. And now my wife has sent a note to say that our own gardener collapsed at his work. Perhaps it wasn't cholera, but the heat. God knows! They sent him at once to the Santa Maddalena. After this I take no risks. To-morrow I'm off to Ischia with my family: earthquakes are flea-bites compared with cholera."

A customer sidled in and stood waiting to be served. The shopman took no notice of him, and he addressed himself to Paolo. Suddenly the other became aware of his presence. He shouted at him from his safe:

"I cannot serve you. Can't you see the shop is shut? Ciro! Luigi! What in the devil's name are you doing with those shutters? D'you want to keep me here all night?"

The customer grumbled and slunk away; but Paolo remained. He was obstinately determined to leave his boxes behind him. Tactfully, without another word, he began to help the shopman in stowing his valuables into the safe. By that time only a narrow slit of doorway remained unshuttered. Ciro and Luigi, a pair of clumsy loafers, stood grinning sheepishly, waiting to be paid. The shopman crammed the coins and notes from the till into his pocket, counting out the silver of their weekly wage. They went. This moment, in which the fellow's hands were full of money, seemed ripe for action.

"My boxes . . . I'll leave them with you?" Paolo suggested.

"Damn you and your boxes!" the shopman screamed. "I've told you already I don't want them. I've finished, I tell you. Now get out of this!"

He urged Paolo toward the slit in the shutters. Paolo stood his ground.

"But I can't carry them away," he protested. "After all, the work was ordered."

"I tell you I don't want them. I'm in a hurry. Let me pass. I'm going to shut the door."

But Paolo, standing before it, had him at his mercy and knew it. They were alone; he was determined. The shopman stared at him with helpless, hunted eyes. Capitulating, he pulled out his pocket-book and thrust a hundred-franc note into Paolo's hands. It was sheer highway robbery.

"I'm afraid I've no change," Paolo told him.

"No change! Is this a time to talk of change? Take it. Who knows if you will ever see me again?"

Paolo laughed. "I do, for one. I'd better wish you good-bye."

Paolo, with the hundred-franc note in his pocket, took the opposite course. By this time more than half of the shops were shut: people on the pavement shrank from contact with each other; whenever friends stopped and spoke together each kept his distance. The cabmen drove furiously through streets unimpeded by traffic, as though the danger that they threatened to human life had become a consideration of no importance. Everybody, afoot or awheel, seemed driven by the same haste of flight, the currents of fugitives crossing and interfusing in the panic of an uprooted ant-hill.

In the narrow streets of the port, the central focus of the disease, from which the upper town recoiled in horror, the panic which had infected the Toledo had not yet penetrated. There, in the deeper layers of Neapolitan consciousness, the stream of life had flowed so steadily, and for so many centuries, that no portents of celestial vengeance could check its current.

The sight was reassuring. To Paolo, newly come from the Toledo, its indifference was also a little sinister. The people of

this quarter knew that cholera was in their midst. Why were they undisturbed? Was it no more than a token of the insensitive age-long degradation that separated them from the refined sensibilities of the modern city? Was it an inherited, oriental fatalism? Or was it, rather, the conscious challenge of a people to whom life had given little but hardship, flung in the face of death? If it were unconscious it was pitiful; if conscious, terrible. In either case its gaiety, its vividness, were mocking and macabre. They made Paolo eager for the refuge of his quiet room. He quickened his pace.

In the square of *San Salvatore* the crowd was denser and noisier than ever. The tent of a marionette-show had been erected in the middle of it. Before its doors a trio of guitar and mandolines tinkled above the hubbub of the crowd. Two naptha lamps illuminated an open space in which young men and girls with white teeth and bold eyes were laughing and singing together. The showman, a dark, one-legged Sicilian, stumped and shouted in front of the tent, to keep his entrance clear.

In spite of his growing uneasiness Paolo stopped, fascinated by the changing colour and movement of the scene. Like an eddy the crowd seized him. He was drawn, in spite of himself, toward the semi-circle of light. The showman with the wooden leg was growing exasperated by the crowd's unruliness. The crowd, delighted to see him lose his temper, grew more unruly than ever. It swayed to and fro in front of the tent, a mass compact and laughing.

"Keep clear . . . keep clear!" he shouted in his uncouth dialect. "Are you Neapolitans Christians or animals? Do you want me to use a knife? Only two *soldi* admission! Come in, ladies and gentlemen, come in! The finest show in the world, just beginning! Keep clear, you devils, keep clear!"

He waved his arm, threateningly. A sudden roar of laughter went up from the crowd. A ragged man was forcing his way through it toward the open space. "Here comes another!" they shouted, hustling him forward, hurling his body on into the light. "This way, sir, this way!" the showman bawled.

Out of the edge of the crowd they flung him. He staggered onward, dazed, his hands grotesquely uplifted till the forward impetus was spent. Then, like a moth, hurled blindly out of darkness, whose body strikes a lamp-globe and falls, stunned, he pitched forward, full length, at the feet of the bemused mandoline player. The showman caught him by the arm, attempting to raise him. He strained and pulled him to his feet. Like a stunned insect he fell again, and lay there, making inco-ordinate movements with his legs.

The crowd shrieked with delight. "He's drunk," they cried. "Master, don't you see he's drunk?"

The man lurched over on to his back; his neck extended, eyes wide open, his bearded face grey in the lamplight, beneath the tinkling mandolines. The showman lifted his arm and let it fall, then leapt away as though a scorpion had stung him.

"He's dead," he cried. "*Madonna mia* . . . he's dead!"

Suddenly, in the centre of the square, there was a dreadful silence. The mandoline player stopped in the middle of his phrase and fled. A whisper like that of wind moving in a ripe cornfield at night, ran through the crowd. Cholera . . . cholera . . . cholera! The word passed with a shuddering sound. The crowd drew back; it scattered, disintegrated, melted like Spring snow. Paolo was standing alone, and cold with horror, in the midst of the empty square. He found himself running, running, like a scared urchin, toward the dark jaws of the Vicolo de Angelis. The beggar of the *fondaci* gave him a leer of recognition as he passed. He did not pause to take breath or think until he had reached his room.

¶

VIVA was waiting for him, his swarthy, sanguine face unshaven and haggard. Into Viva's ears he poured the story of what he had seen in the square.

"Cholera, undoubtedly," Viva affirmed. He prowled about the room like a lean wolf, expounding rapidly: "That is the form which it is taking. *Foudroyant* . . . fulminating, if you understand the word. I mean that the poison of this accursed *spirillum* of Koch's kills them before the other characteristic symptoms have time to develop. Fortunately, experts are coming to help us, from Paris and Berlin. But when they come they'll have to take their coats off and pull in with the rest of us. Why, we're short-handed already. The swine that call

themselves doctors in Naples are bolting like rats. Let's talk no more about it for the moment. I'm sick with hunger. Where the hell's Cristina ? "

He threw himself on the bed and lay there, limp, exhausted. When, a minute later, Cristina entered the room with their supper, he didn't open his eyes. She came in timidly, without a word she lit the candles and set her tray on the table. She seemed so youthful and gracious in the half light that Paolo, already overstrung with the tension of imminent drama, was shattered by the memory of his ruthlessness toward her; the debt unpaid, the atonement uncompleted. She would not meet his eyes; neither by word nor look could he empty his heart of its intolerable contents. Suddenly Viva shook himself out of his dog-like doze. He jumped to his feet and rubbed his haggard eyes.

" Ready ? " he cried, with all his accustomed energy. " Wait, wait, Cristina ! Where the hell are you running to ? " She hung in the doorway, frightened by his violence. He stalked to the table and glared at the food on it. " Salads . . ." he said. " Salads are washed with water. This is how we treat them." He picked up the plate which she had prepared and threw its contents through the window. " Water . . " The contents of the carafe followed those of the plate. " Poison ! D'you hear me ? From this forward we drink nothing but wine. Wine. What's the woman staring at ? Are you an idiot ? "

" She doesn't understand," said Paolo, flying to the rescue.

" Of course she doesn't. These damned people never will. That's why they'll die like rats in their holes."

" Then, for God's sake explain. She thinks you're mad. You've frightened her."

" Explain ? " cried Viva. " What have I been doing all day ? Listen, Cristina. You know that the whole port is thick with cholera ? "

She shook her head. She knew nothing . . . nothing !

" Well then, you damned well ought to," Viva grumbled. " Cholera, I say. An epidemic. This house is in the middle of it. Cholera comes from water. Get that into your head. Water is poison. For your own sake and ours keep clear of it. Fear it as you'd fear the devil. Keep to the house, or else you'll carry in infection."

There was something inspiring and characteristic in Viva's downrightness. Whatever his faults—and Paolo had cause to know them—the man was vivid and sincere. All the old loyalties flared up in answer to his strength, his ruthlessness, his realism. In this charged atmosphere of storm his stature was magnified gigantically; it rose up like a tower, and Paolo glowed with admiration and confidence. This was the man for an emergency. Even Cristina must see it.

Suddenly Viva turned and laughed in her bewildered face.

" So, now that's over, and you know the worst, we'll eat."

He swung a chair to the table and ravenously attacked his supper. Outside the circle of candle-flame, Cristina stood and waited. Paolo could not see her there; but, all the time he was conscious of her presence. If he had seen her, he thought he must have died of joy and strangeness. There was no need to see her. It was enough that she existed. She and himself together. A new soul, miraculously, inviolably created. A miracle as unassailable as the birth of a new star in space. So clean, so exalted, so secure, that even if death . . "

" What are you staring at now, Paolo ? " Viva grunted suddenly. " Your eyes are full of tears. You must have taken cold. Coryza. Finish the bottle of wine and go to bed. You needn't wait for me. I promised to go back to the hospital and take my turn at nine." He cleared his throat, pushed back his chair, lit a broken cigar and threw himself again upon his bed. " I don't know what's the matter with you people this evening," he growled. " You seem to be dazed, the pair of you. Cristina, we've finished. Why the devil don't you clear away ? "

She came to the table and removed Viva's plates. Her eyes were lowered; she did not show him her face, but Paolo shuddered at the sweetness of her presence. Methodically she swept the crumbs from the table. She was coming near him. His limbs trembled, his heart fluttered wildly, faltered, as though it must stop beating. Cristina was so near that her arm brushed his sleeve, her pale hand stole toward him. It was over; their hands had met. In that moment he had touched divinity. She knew, she knew !

Viva rolled from the bed; he rose to his feet and pulled his hat on. Short of the doorway he found himself face to face with

the retreating Cristina. He stared at her curiously.

" Upon my soul, Cristina, you're crying too ! The thing must be infectious."

" No, no, Pietro," she protested, smiling, with a broken voice. " It's nothing. You're mistaken. The smoke of your cigar . . "

She escaped his scrutiny hurriedly, with her tray.

When Viva had gone, Paolo sat on at the table, with tranced eyes.

At first he could see nothing. Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the dark, the square of the window defined itself as a disc, faintly illumined by the lights of the city beneath. In an abstraction of pure, unthinking happiness he stood, suspended. Only one sense survived this nirvana of beatitude: his hearing, strained, alert, like the controller of some advanced listening post, to catch the sound of a footstep on the stairs. A faint sound reached it. He shuddered, like a tree caught in a squall of wind. She was coming. At last . . at last !

Silence. The eager sentinels had deceived him. But even though the instant of alarm had passed, the thrill of anticipation and desire continued to possess him; his heart still hammered its precipitate rhythm; his limbs still glowed and trembled. Gradually his heart-beats slowed; his burning limbs grew cold. If, after all, he had been deceiving himself? If she had neither understood nor shared the ecstasy, the promise of that mystical contact? If, understanding and transported as he was, she had found her terror, the black hunter, waiting below? A pang of jealousy, fiercer than his desire, seized him. She was his—his, eternally. Whatever the power that bound her, he would assert his right of possession. " Wait, wait . . ." his reason advised him. He had done with waiting. Hadn't he waited month after futile month? His passion shrivelled all prudence and reason together. Sheeted in its flame, he passed to the door and flung it open. A warm shadow impeded his passage. It was she, Cristina. Like tongues of flame in the darkness they met.

" Paolo," she whispered.

" Cristina ! "

" My own, my darling ! "

" Cristina . . . I love you."

" I cannot believe it. Oh, Paolo, Paolo ! I cannot bear it ! "

" There is nobody like you, Cristina. I worship you."

" What can you worship, Paolo ? I am nothing, only what you have made me."

" Yourself . . . yourself ! Tell me, my love, you knew ? "

" Yes, yes, I knew. You didn't love me before."

" I have loved you always. I think I must have been blind."

" No, no, you didn't love me. You shall not excuse yourself. What does it matter now ? . . . Oh, Paolo, Paolo," she cried, " why am I not younger— "

" Cristina," he answered, " how can you use that word ? Never again ! I forbid you. Now there is no such thing as time for us. I wouldn't have you different. I want you as you are."

He drew her into the darkened room and locked the door behind them. The sound of the key grating in its wards stabbed her with alarm. She clutched his arm.

" Oh, Paolo ! Suppose he came ? '

" Then let him come ! " he laughed. " Neither God nor devil can take you from me to-night ! "

He caught her in his arms again. Her alarm melted away beneath his fire.

" It is only for you that I'm afraid," her lips protested. His own lips closed them. " There is no more fear," he told her through his kisses. He gathered her to him with strong, quivering hands. He kissed her closed eyes. They fluttered like caught birds. She was all warm, tremulous, yielding, like a captured nestling in his embrace. She sighed. She was gentle, unresisting, and content.

For a long time they had spoken no word but the sweet syllables of their own murmured names. The room was lonely as a cloud; remote, becalmed, high-lifted above the sleeping city. There they lay, clasped in each other's arms, awake, and softly breathing. They had no need for words or looks. Only, at times, when Paolo opened his eyes, he would see that Cristina's also were open and gazing at him. In the dusk they seemed of a deep, mysterious softness, for he had never seen love in the eyes before. And her face, too, in its luminous pallor and complete repose, seemed to have lost all trace of the fears and sufferings that had left their mark upon it. It was the face of a child, angelic in its innocence; spiritualised, made more than human by the peace of love. So, without words or movement, they lay

and gazed solemnly at each other, until their hearts could hold no more intolerable sweetness.

The sound of a discordant clanging, whose overtones trembled on the motionless air, recalled them simultaneously to consciousness. They listened as its echoes died away into silence.

"Two o'clock," Cristina whispered. Her voice was awed and childlike.

"Why should we count the strokes?" he answered impatiently.

"Because they tell us that we are safe," she said. "I know that he won't come to-night."

"Cristina, my sweet one, why should you think of him? Why can't you be like me, who think of nothing but you?"

"I can't," she told him. "When one is quiet like this in the dark, so many thoughts take hold of one."

"I defy them to frighten you. Don't you realise? All that is finished."

"Ah, God, if it *were* finished!" she murmured.

"I will not allow the thought of him to enter your brain. Because you are mine, Cristina."

"Yes, I am yours," she answered dreamily. "Nothing can alter that." She took his face in her hands; she kissed him long and tenderly. "Now I must go," she said. "Good-bye, my darling."

He would not let her go. He needed her. Above all, he could not bear that their parting should be marred by the mysterious uneasiness which darkened her voice and set her spirit at a distance from his. His arms could no longer contain her; she was alien, unmoved by his entreaties.

"At any moment," she said, "Viva may return."

"What does it matter?"

She shook her head. "He is bound to know. He might even come to wake you with some urgent news. And then——"

"Listen: he told me that he wouldn't be back before three. Another hour, at least. Each moment so precious. Only think what we have wasted already!"

She smiled. "You are so eager, Paolo, and life is only beginning. It is dangerous, trying to grasp too much. No, no, I must go. I want to go; and if you love me you won't try to prevent me."

Releasing herself from his arms, she left him; her shadow crossed the luminous square of the window. He followed her. Clasped together, they stood gazing into the starless night. All Naples slept beneath them. Its lights were like the smoulder of a city burnt to ashes. Quiet as death! Above, a silence that tingled, as with vibrations of lost starlight; beneath them, the drugged stillness of sleep.

Suddenly that silence was lacerated by a sound of terror, the voice of a woman, screaming and wailing for help from the pit of the hidden street.

"Help, help!" she wailed. 'My husband, my Michele, he is dead—dead!"

The sound wavered as she ran along the street, calling and calling. Soon it was lost in that of opening windows, in the shouting of those that answered her. The street was a hubbub of cries and counter-cries, confused in the panic of a city taken by stealth. Paolo and Cristina clung together and listened. Like a black bat, fluttering out of the dark, fear flew into their hearts.

"The cholera," Paolo whispered.

"Cholera," she repeated. "In the night. . . ."

"What can it matter to us?" he cried. "Life and death. . . . We are above both of them, so high that nothing can touch us. Yesterday, perhaps. But now we have lived, we have lived! In this moment we're living, Cristina. To-morrow? To-morrow stretches to the end of time. We will not think of it. We're one. Nothing can part us. Death . . . let him do his worst! I laugh; I snap my fingers at him!"

## ¶

BENEATH the black curtain of pestilence, that turned Naples into a city of night, the dark rose of their love unfolded.

"We're in the thick of it here," Viva confided to Paolo. "San Salvatore's the central focus. The filth of these streets on the edge of the port; all these old houses, riddled with *fondaci*. . . . What can you expect? The cholera asks for nothing better. It flourishes like weed on a dung-hill. As for the hospitals, we've done our best, but we can't do any more. The Pellegrini and Gesù e Maria won't hold another bed. And, in my opinion, it's only beginning."

He walked the room abstractedly. Paolo could see that the heroic strain was beginning to tell on him. All his spruceness had disappeared. His clothes were dusty and

dishevelled. His sanguine face was drawn, grey, hungry; his cheek unshaven.

"Why don't you go?" he turned on Paolo suddenly. "Why, in God's name, haven't you gone already? You're doing nothing here. You can't do any good. I've told you times on end that it's madness to stay here. Shut up this room, leave the keys with me, work your way back to Pogerola and stay there till it's over!"

"We've had this all before, Pietro," Paolo told him. "Two days ago you were raging against the people who had 'ratted.' Well, I'm not going to rat."

"You talk like an idiot. Get out of it, before it's too late."

"Yes, save my skin, take cholera to Pogerola, and leave my friends—you and Cristina. Many thanks for the kind suggestion," Paolo answered.

"Politeness?" Viva growled. "You can leave me out of it. I can look after myself. Doctors carry charmed lives; it's poor damned laymen like you who kick the bucket. As for Cristina . . . I'm hanged if I see what Cristina has to do with it."

Paolo laughed.

"Cristina's in the same boat as ourselves," he parried. "In any case, I'm going to see it through."

"I suppose you think you're a hero?" Viva sneered.

"Not in the least. You should know me better than that. It's simply because I've made up my mind, and am as stubborn as a donkey. Leave it at that."

"You never spoke a truer word." Viva laughed bitterly. Then, suddenly he turned on Paolo and gripped his hand. "Paolo, you're the damndest fool in christendom, but you're a good friend. I don't see much of you in these vile days, but I'd be lost without you. That's the solemn truth. Only, for both our sakes, don't neglect the precautions of which I've told you."

"No fear of that," Paolo assured him. "I never felt less like dying in my life."

¶

WHEN Viva went back to hospital Cristina joined Paolo. They were as solitary as the first lovers in Eden. The house in the *Vicolo de Angelis* was a world set apart. On the day that followed their night of wonder, the cloud of warning that brooded on the city had disappeared; the whole sky cleared to an endless, heavenly blue. No alien invaded their paradise. From the outbreak of the epidemic Cristina's master had deserted her. It was a desertion that made Paolo hate and despise him more than ever; yet he was thankful for it. For days on end they saw no living soul but Viva.

Their life was surrounded by a strange quietness. Under a combined tyranny of fear and heat, the people kept their houses. That clamorous city, the noisiest in Europe, suddenly became dumb. The cabs, the hawkers' barrows disappeared, as though the plague had selected them for early destruction. Now the only wheels to be heard at night were those of the long-shafted wains of the Sanitary Authority, jolting their load of mortality from stone to stone, stopping, at the muffled drivers' commands, to pick up outcast dead or dying from the *fondaci*, carrying them on to indiscriminate burial in the plague-pits of Poggiouale.

Viva, or Viva's spectre, more thin, more harrassed, more irritable every day, would sprawl on his bed and tell them how things were going. His views were not encouraging.

"We're all at sixes and sevens," he complained. "There's no direction. The Sanitary Authority's like some damned old woman, throwing up her hands and running from house to house. It's fantastic! You'd think we were in the Middle Ages. Bonfires in the streets: that's the latest decree. As if it weren't hot enough as it is! Science? They won't listen to it. All that counts in these days is superstition. Portents and relics and amulets. You can see it for yourself in the streets.

"To think," he went on, "that all these years we've been fools enough to take Naples for granted, as if it were an ordinary city! Now I know better. Naples is a hundred cities. A palimpsest. You, Paolo, with your parchments, know what that means. A palimpsest of a hundred layers, and cholera the solvent. Up till now we've seen nothing but the modern script on the top. The cholera eats away that surface like acid. Out comes the Renaissance: fires in the streets, amulets, religious processions! Another layer goes: we find ourselves staring at the Dark Ages. Another: and it's Pompeii! But we haven't finished yet. As for the *fondaci* . . . that old fraud Dante would rub his eyes if he saw them. He wouldn't have the face to say he'd been in hell before. At first it turned me sick—though God knows my stomach's strong

enough—but now it means nothing to me. Nothing! I'm in it: I'm in it. I laugh. I glory in it. I'm like a drunken man roaring at a bad joke. You understand?"

At this he burst into peals of shrill and horrible laughter. Their ghastliness chilled Paolo's heart. He saw the tight-lipped horror in Cristina's face. It seemed to him that Viva's reason was swaying on the edge of mad abysses. He caught at his arm, held him, and tried to steady him. Viva stopped laughing, glared at him savagely. "What is the matter now?"

"Pietro, this is impossible," he told him. "You cannot go on indefinitely like this. You won't eat; you don't sleep. There's a breaking point, and I think you've just about reached it. You've wrecked your body already; if you go on like this you'll smash your brain as well. You can't go back to the hospital to-night."

"Can't, can't?" Viva cried passionately. "And who the devil are you to talk like this? What right have you . . .?"

"We're friends," Paolo began.

"Friends?" He laughed harshly. "I tell you there is no more friendship. Friendship belonged to the age before the flood. Why are you frightened of madness? Can't you see for yourself that the whole world's mad . . . you, and I, and Cristina, and everybody in Naples? You'd better leave me alone!"

His grey lips trembled as he spoke; his eyes were dangerous and malignant; he glared at Paolo like a wild beast separated from its den. Such passionate determination was unanswerable. And Viva, crouched to spring, profited by his silence:

"You think I'm mad," he snarled. "Who are you to teach me? My God, you make me sick! What are you doing here at all? Are you afraid to move? You talk to me about madness, and here you hang with your damned dreamy inertia when you might have been safe in Pogerola three weeks ago!"

He flung out of the room in a blind fury. Paolo, staring after him, dazed by the torrent of words, was caught as suddenly in another spate. Cristina. "Paolo," she was saying, her arms clasped about his neck, "Paolo, my darling, don't you see that he has spoken the truth? How blind I've been! Blind, I suppose, with love. But that makes no difference to my wickedness. Now that he's opened my eyes I can see it and could kill myself with shame. The time you have wasted! What he said is true: a fortnight ago you might have been safe in Pogerola. He's right: you can do no good. Paolo, you must go at once! To-night. Not another minute!"

He took her in his arms; he tried to stop her entreaties with kisses; her purpose was hard as steel, but it would not move him.

"Do you know so little of me," he said, "as to think that I can leave you here alone? You are my life, Cristina."

"That's what you think for the moment, Paolo," she pleaded, "and I love you for it. But even if I've been blind—ah, cruelly blind—before, I must see clearly now. It will pass; you'll forget me; some day, when I'm forgotten, you'll love and marry a woman younger than yourself. It is certain; I know it; and I don't grudge you or her that happiness. Remember what Pietro said. There's no time to lose. Paolo, my own darling, forget me, leave me, Paolo . . ."

He would not let her go. She struggled to free herself so violently that her body was bruised by him.

"Do you think," he cried, "that I am weaker than you? That you can force me to leave you? Even if you'd begged me to go a fortnight since, I'd have refused. You never thought of such a thing till that mad Pietro put it into your head. Now it's too late."

"No, no, it isn't too late. You reproach me? Oh, Paolo, you are cruel! If you can speak like that it's clear that you don't love me; and that is all the more reason why you should go."

"Now you are twisting my words. You know that I'm not cruel. That is a lie, and you know it. You know, as well as I do, that I love you and no other living soul."

"Your mother, Paolo?" she whispered.

"Ah, Cristina, you're clever; but you don't catch me like that. I've thought of her, and I've chosen. I love you—the words are becoming monotonous—nothing that you say can make me leave you, so you'd better resign yourself to the inconvenience of my staying."

He laughed. She couldn't understand it. His satire, which had always puzzled, now had power to wound her. She pulled all her forces together for a final effort.

"Then you shall stay," she said quickly. "I will not ask you to go again. You may kill yourself; but you shall not make me

a murderess. You stay for yourself, not for me. I have nothing more to do with it. I hope I shall never see you again. Now let me go. I wish it."

"Cristina," he cried, "you're joking!"

"No, I'm not joking." She shuddered. "I leave the jokes to you. You may break as many hearts as you like with your jokes, but not mine. You cannot hurt me any more. It is finished. No, no, you need not kiss me. Once I made myself a thief for your kisses; but that's all over. You've broken me, killed me. I cannot bear to look at you."

She put her hands to her eyes. She began to cry softly; her voice was like a baby's wailing. His own voice wavered as he spoke to her:

"Cristina, my darling, come to me. You didn't understand. I'd rather have died than have hurt you like this."

He stretched out his arms to her; she ceased her crying and gazed at him with solemn, stricken eyes.

"Then you will go?" she murmured.

"I cannot go. You know it."

"Ah, how I hate you!" she cried.

She ran to the door; he followed, but as he reached her she slammed it in his face. Down the dark stairs she fluttered. He could not overtake her, and when she reached the ground floor he was a flight behind. He stood there, burning and humiliated, outside her locked door. He called, again and again, but she would not answer. He was too stirred by anger, frustration and desire to realise how foolish he looked. At that moment he cared for nothing, wanted nothing but Cristina. He clenched his fists and hammered on the closed door till his knuckles bled. He shouted at the keyhole. The vast well of the stairs mocked him with stony echoes. Silence. He could do no more.

The air of the vestibule was dense in his lungs. He felt that he must suffocate with it. All the blood in his body seemed to be rushing to his head. His head was a furnace in which his brain was melting, melting away.

"Water," he thought, "cold water." Water was poison. How many times had Viva raved about it. He could not go on burning away like this. "The sea," he thought, "the sea. That's what I want. Surely the sea is pure enough!"

Out of that air of suffocation he staggered into the street, driven blindly, like a predestinate lemming, to reach the sea. Wave after wave of sulphur blew into his throat and choked him. He choked and gasped and ran.

"Water," he thought; "cold water, pure water, the sea!" But would he ever reach it? Here, in the square at least, the air was freer from sulphur than in the Vicolo. Huge and empty it seemed; no stalls, no barrows, not even the painted theatre of the marionettes; so vast that he doubted if he would have strength to cross it.

He halted to take breath. As if that fetid air could give it him! Fine shivers, like summer lightning, flickered down his spine, his legs; he couldn't say if they were cold or heat.

At least he had succeeded in crossing the square. He was thankful for the achievement. If he pushed on to westward he would reach the sea in the neighbourhood of *Santa Lucia*, where, Viva had told him, there was no cholera. As if cholera mattered! Nothing mattered now but the burning in his brain, the suffocation of his clogged lungs.

The streets were endless. They danced and glimmered before his eyes. I'm going blind," he thought. "I'm a painter, and I'm going blind. I'd rather die than that." He rubbed his eyes violently into flashes of blue light, and went lurching on. He supposed that whether he became blind or not, he was going to die. Certainly he would die, unless he reached the sea. He must reach it . . . if only for Cristina. Cristina . . . this was her fault. And he loved her!

The narrow street poured its fugitives into a little square. They carried him with them and subsided, like a rapid swirling into a pool. At last he knew where he was. There, on the right, stood the little wineshop that he had frequented with Viva and his friends. "Wine," he thought, "red wine from Gragnano, out of a cool cellar."

"It will be better than water," he thought; "perhaps it will steady me." He dragged himself to the pavement in an agony of fear lest the wineshop should be shut.

It was open, thank God, but empty.

"Gragnano . . . . a litre," Paolo gasped.

The man stared, and shrank from him. "You are ill?"

" No, no . . . not ill. The sulphur is in my throat. Only a little faint."

The shop-keeper brought him a jug of wine and a glass. Paolo swallowed his wine, glass after glass. The man watched him curiously.

" We haven't seen you lately. I didn't know whether you'd left Naples or died. You never know in these days. I suppose you've come here to meet the doctor? He usually drops in about this time. My God! I said you were ill. Why did you deny it? Heaven help us! "

Even as he spoke, Paolo felt himself sliding from his chair. The jug of wine crashed on the stone floor beside him. The wine splashed in his face with a heavenly coolness. " No, I'm not ill," he thought, " I'm only dying." He saw the tavern-keeper grotesquely taking shelter behind his butts. He shut his eyes. It was easier to surrender.

People were talking in loud voices over his head. He heard an insane jumble of words. Cholera . . . cholera . . . cholera. As if that had anything to do with it! One voice was curiously like Viva's. It was Viva's. Viva had taken him by the arm and tried to pull him to his feet. His legs would not obey him. Viva's arms were round him. He heard the panting of Viva's breath beneath the load. He was lifted and carried out into the street. He was moving; heavy wheels were jolting over the uneven sets of limestone. A new horror seized him. The long-shafted carts of the Sanitary Authority that went by in the night! The muffled drivers had picked him up; they were carrying him, living, to the pits at Poggiouale. He heard Viva's voice no longer. Viva had deserted him. His dry throat struggled to shape words:

" I'm alive . . . alive! It's a mistake; I'm not dead yet! "

It seemed as if he shouted them. But nobody heard him.

¶

FOR three weeks Paolo, or the ghost of him, lay in the hospital of Gesù e Maria. Viva, finding him collapsed in the wine-shop, had bribed a passing carter to carry him there. So much he knew: for when, in a cloud of carbolic spray, they dragged him through the hospital gates, a sudden clearing of consciousness, like a window in cloud, admitted, straight to the centre of his fuddled brain, the familiar tones of Viva's voice and even a momentary vision of Viva's face.

After that, darkness.

For a long time he found it difficult to believe that he had survived. Then, suddenly, as though a mysterious system of tourniquets had been removed, life began to flow back into his limbs. The nurse who brought him food, a rough peasant woman from Caserta, smiled and joked with him in her swift passage. " We'll soon be seeing the last of you," she said. " Good-bye and a good riddance, that's what it will be."

" It was really cholera? " he asked her.

" Cholera? *Madonna mia!* I should think it was cholera. Didn't I look after you? I ought to know! "

As soon as he could arrange his thoughts he asked for Viva. It seemed strange that Viva, who had brought him to the hospital, should have deserted him.

" Viva? I don't know the name.' The nurse shook her head.

" The doctor who brought me here."

" That doesn't help me. My memory's gone completely. There are so many doctors that I don't know half their names. But, when I find a moment to spare—which isn't often, mind you—I'll make enquiries."

That evening, when she brought him his dish of soup, he asked her if she'd any news for him. She hesitated.

" Pietro Viva, that was your doctor's name.'

" Pietro Viva. Yes," he answered eagerly.

" Poor fellow, he's not been here for more than a fortnight, they tell me. Probably he's gone the way of all the rest." For once, the word " dead " did not come easily to her tongue; but Paolo knew what she meant.

" No, no! I won't believe it," he cried. " He was so strong, so full of life. And doctors—he told me so himself—carry charmed lives.

" Poor souls, I wish it were true." the woman murmured.

Paolo would not let her go.

" It's more likely," he said, trying to persuade himself to believe what he was saying, " it's almost certain that he was too worn out to come to the hospital. I must go and find him at once. When do you think they'll allow me to go? "

The nurse shook her head warningly. ' If you take on like this, you'll lose all the

ground you've gained. You'll do no good by fretting. Lie quiet, and get your strength, there's a good boy. Be patient, and think no more about it."

To think no more about it! That was impossible. Day after day, night after night, he lay there thinking of the house in the Vicolo de Angelis; that little room, the cradle of all his dreams; Viva, his friend, his saviour; Cristina.

At the end of the third week the doctors told him, brusquely, that he could go. Although the full violence of the epidemic had spent itself, the hospital was still desperately overcrowded, the city continued to clamour for empty beds.

A grotesque, black-bearded skeleton, Paolo staggered out into the street. He stood irresolute, disorientated, as though he had been dropped from a balloon into the heart of some foreign city. The air was cool and sweet, for the drought had broken and rain fallen in the night. It seemed to him that everything about him, even the air he breathed, was unreal. "I am I, Paolo Ricci," he told himself; "I am alive, and this is Naples!"

The slope of the streets falling to the port embarrassed his wasted muscles and made his legs tremble. One after another, familiar landmarks made his heart beat faster, warning him that the moment of intolerable joy was drawing near.

"Cristina—Cristina!"

¶

WITH a shiver of joy he entered the Vicolo de Angelis. He knew it, every stone of the broken pavement. The houses, sombre but benevolent, rose on either side. There, on the right, crouched at the mouth of the *fondaci* as if he had never changed his station, sat the beggar who had wished him a hundred years of happiness. He stared at Paolo without recognition as he passed, and Paolo was too transported with eagerness to wave a salutation.

There stood the great arched gateway. Paolo turned to enter it. He could not. The way was barred by an iron gate. The gate was fastened with a chain and a heavy padlock. To its bars, at the level of his eyes, was fixed a wooden notice-board, with a rain-spattered inscription of capitals scrawled in chalk. He stared at it; he read it over and over again. Its significance seemed powerless to penetrate his shattered brain. His brain could not accept the words that were written:

CLOSED BY ORDER OF THE SANITARY AUTHORITY.

He reeled, as though he had been smitten by a blow on the head. He put his hands to his head and fell on the broken pavement. He was stunned; he gave up the ghost; he ceased to exist. The beggar from the mouth of the *fondaci* limped over and regarded him dispassionately, as though he had fallen from the sky. Another dead man. Such trifles were not interesting in these days. He squatted on the ground beside Paolo and began to go through his pockets methodically. Paolo knew what was happening. He did not care.

Suddenly his stupor left him; he came back to life. Part of him only—a strange, unrecognisable part that detached itself from the dissolution of the rest. It freed itself from the death of the self that he knew, neither body nor soul, a pure, naked intelligence, inviolable, immune from fear or love or horror or any other emotion. It took command. It pulled his destroyed body from the ground. It spoke with the dead tongue, with the dead lips, to the astonished beggar.

"You know me; you have seen me before. I used to live here. This house, how long has it been closed?"

The beggar stared at him. "Eh, now I come to look at you," he whined, "I seem to remember."

"Answer my question. When did they close the house?"

"How can I mind a thing like that? A week ago, a fortnight. Who knows? Why, they shut them up one by one, dozens of them, because of this cholera. Haven't you heard tell of that?"

"And the people who lived there. When did they go? What happened to them?"

"That's a hard thing to ask! I tell you, the cholera's been about. Oh, yes, I've had it myself." He cackled obscenely. "But they can't kill skin and bones; they can't kill the likes of me!"

"Listen," the obedient voice of Paolo continued. "Besides myself there were two people in the house. A young doctor—you must remember him—and a woman. Where have they gone?"

"Ask me something easier," the beggar cackled. "You can go to Poggioulale and

look, or, if he is still alive, you can ask the master of the house."

"The master of the house? You know him? His name, and where he lives?"

"How should I not know him? I've lived here fifty years. I know him as well as I know my own hands. Of course I do. He's Vincenzo Saccola, the gold-beater, a rare old bull too! Don Animale: that's the name he goes by; and if he's living, you're like to find him at his shop behind the *Via Constantinopoli*, on the left-hand side as you come from here. You go and ask him. No good asking an old man like me who hasn't filled his belly for a week."

Unthinking, still drawing strength and purpose from that mysterious survival, Paolo's broken body was driven, like a derelict with set sails, across the centre of the city toward the *Via Constantinopoli*. The street of the gold-beaters? Strangers whom he accosted hurriedly showed him the way.

On the left . . . Paolo was pushing his way through the haggling, malodorous crowd. He went ruthlessly, without excuses, like a doomed man. Before a cavern of a shop, with wide doors thrown open, the pavement was free. Out of its darkness he heard a sound of hammering, blows falling rapidly, incessantly, one after another on a dull surface. He peered inside.

The hammerers took no notice of him. Their eyes were lowered. They went on beating with the absorbed intentness of machines, with a maddening regularity. Three workmen, standing at three tables covered with sheet lead, hammering gold into leaf between two layers of parchment. The foremost table was that of the black hunter. He stood above it with his short neck bent forward, a hammer in either hand, savagely obliterating the surface of a sheet of parchment which Paolo recognised as part of the Salerno codex. He hammered the parchment as if he hated it, as if he were determined that no letter should survive.

When Paolo spoke to him he did not break the rhythm of his work. He raised his eyes and stared, grudgingly; they were infused, resentful, like those of some wild animal roused from a dream of lust. Evidently he did not recognise Paolo in this spectral guise.

"You know me," Paolo explained. "I was your lodger in the Vicolo de Angelis. Myself and my friend Viva, the doctor."

"Yes, yes, I know you," the gold-beater growled. "You're wasting time by coming here. It's no good asking me for your rubbish. They've put seals on the house. It's empty. It'll have to be fumigated. I can do nothing for you. Come again in a month's time."

"My belongings are nothing," Paolo began . . .

"Then why the devil do you come here, wasting my time?"

"Cristina and Viva. You know where they are? You can tell me?" Paolo pleaded.

"Why should I know about them? D'you think I'm a fool to go risking my life down there?" the gold-beater laughed brutally. "I tell you the house is empty and sealed. If you want to find where they're buried you'd better try Poggiouale."

His lips were twisted into an evil leer. A sudden blindness of anger fell on Paolo. In that moment he was ready for murder. It failed, like a flaw of wind. In the next he was drifting, all that remained of him, out through the noisy length of the *Via Constantinopoli*, out through the city gates and the degraded suburbs, over roadways deep in dust, through the flat market-gardens, into the yellowing vineyards on the flank of Vesuvius where wine is pressed which they call the "Tears of Christ."

There, amid the songs and laughter of the grape-harvest, the body of Paolo Ricci fell asleep; the soul of the boy who had loved Cristina died.

¶

THEREAFTER, in the high peace of Pogerola, another Paolo came gradually to life. For two years he lived with his mother, in their cottage by the vineyard, sharing the peasant's life which was hers by nature, sapping the terraces in Spring and Autumn, training the vine-shoots to trellisses, cutting and binding faggots of olive branch for fuel.

Pogerola had now more cause than ever to laugh at him when he stalked through it with his black beard and tragic eyes. "The cholera in Naples," people would say: "Paolo Ricci was always a bit queer, but that business touched him." There was a story that he had been flung living into one of the plague-pits. No wonder that the poor devil was strange!

But Paolo rarely passed through the village if he could avoid it.

He had forbidden his mind ever to think of Naples. His " stuff," as the black gold-beater had called those ardent early Riccis, remained in that little cylinder of a room at the top of the house in the Vicolo de Angelis until a new tenant burnt it. He dared not think of Naples, and, for this reason he dared not paint, lest the poignancy of associations should send him mad again.

In his own mind he was satisfied that he had once been mad. It seemed that he could only find a certain immunity from this danger in a life of physical labour. Therefore, in the early dawn, when his mother called him, he would rise, thankfully, and make his way to the fields with his mattock over his shoulder.

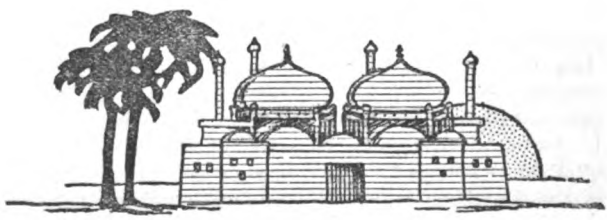
Concetta was a woman of few words. She knew, as well as he did, what it was to suffer in silence. Perhaps, like the people in the village, she thought his brain had been touched. From the moment when she took him, broken as he was, into her arms she was never moved to ask him what had happened during the black days in Naples. When they had eaten they sat and looked at each other, without speaking, like animals in a shed, until their heads began to nod with sleep. Then Paolo would lurch away silently into his bedroom, praying that he might be spared the torment of dreams. For, in his dreams, Cristina was still very near to him.

In the spring of the second year Concetta died. They buried her in the grave of the infidel Andrea. In Pogerola people whom Paolo had forgotten stopped him, with easy tears in their eyes, and wrung his hand. He could not answer their condolences with fitting words. He had loved his mother; yet, in his present state of annihilation, her death seemed hardly to move him. He tramped back, cold and sullen, to the empty house. He sat there, stunned and tearless, till, of a sudden, mercifully, tears came. Bitterly, uncontrolledly, he cried like a child.

By midsummer he had sold the mountain property and left Pogerola. With money, though little enough, in his pocket, he made his way to Rome. He studied painting there, and later in Paris. He prospered. He became a citizen of the world. London received him, and, after London, America. There, in the opulent forcing-house of New York, he found wealth, reputation, and at last the celebrity which his austere and exquisite art compelled.

Women he had known in plenty, but not love. And he had never married . . . A man of sixty, a man of much fame and few friendships, he rose that night from his bench upon the boat-deck of the *Trinacria* and passed with precise steps towards the companion-ladder, passed out of vision of the green-tiled cupola of *San Salvatore*, luminous in starlight, into the radiance of the lower deck. The elderly ladies in their deck-chairs turned and smiled at him. A curious, formal figure, but a celebrity. He bowed stiffly, acknowledging their salutations, and entered the warm alleyway that led to his stateroom.

A mirror faced him; an opaline lamp-bulb shone above it. Shrinking from the reflection of his own grey features, he switched off the light. He locked the cabin door and threw himself on the narrow bed. There, as he lay far into the night, motionless, with closed eyes, it seemed to him, Paolo Ricci, as though he had performed, in memory, an act of atonement for lack of which his soul had lain in torment for forty years. Those ghostly eyes of Cristina, that door, forever locked, would cease their haunting. He lay there, that grey man, as placid as a child. His heart was purged and made humble by the perfume of those tragic flowers. His barren life seemed sweetened by the odour of black roses.



# White Narcissus

## By JASSY TORRUND

*(Specially translated for* THE ARGOSY *by Therese Ericsson)*

**This beautiful and dramatic story provides yet another variation of the theme indicated in the title of the series. The conflict between two kinds of love, each powerful but irreconcilable with the other, is developed with unusual force and rare skill. It is the work of a German authoress whose stories have won her high regard in her own country.**

SHE had married her cousin—out of obedience, some people said—*par dépit d'amour*, said the others; the fact was that she had now lived separated from him for two years. With her little daughter she had gone to her widowed mother in the lonely castle-like house where she had been born and spent her childhood and lived a bored existence in the little sleepy country town, where she was known by everyone since she was a schoolgirl with golden hair. The good neighbours put their heads together and whispered that there might be a divorce.

Marie Madeleine heard the whisperings but she did not care. Indifferently she carried the burden of her dreary, joyless life day after day.

But once in spring—when little Marie Madeleine was playing and running about in the enormously large garden which had grown half wild in some places, when the lilac was filling the air with its fragrance and the birds were singing their love songs—the young woman could no longer stand the life in the little town. She packed her trunk and went to the capital where one can live, enjoy life and—forget. She had a married school friend there, and to her she went.

"I must see a nerve doctor," she told her mother; "my head gives me such pain." Ah, well, there was nothing the matter with her head, it was her heart that was in pain—and the spring and the lilac smell had a part in it. When in the capital Madeleine did not go to a nerve doctor but to a soul doctor, who in this case was an old friend of hers, for whom she already as a girl had had an infatuation. He was now a solicitor with a large clientèle and still unmarried. With this friend she now discussed the possibilities of a divorce.

Her marriage was like hundreds of others. She had married at eighteen, and the first years had been a constant running from pleasure to pleasure, a chain of triumphs and victories for the young, graceful and temperamental lady with the silvery laugh and the bright, impulsive manner. "She is enchanting," said the whole regiment.

Then—just as little Marie Madeleine was beginning to speak and worried her mother with questions as to when her promised little brother would come—the young mother had a severe confinement and the hope of an heir was for ever destroyed. Many weeks passed before she could leave the clinic, and then followed a time when she lay on her sofa, taking no notice of husband and child. She became nervous and irritable, brooding over her destroyed hopes.

This sad change in the wife who in her happy carelessness, herself unknowingly, had been the good genius of her husband and made his home dear and pleasant was not without reaction on him. At first he bore his burden in a friendly way, pitying her physical and mental pain—then he became indifferent—and finally felt it to be an unbearable chain which he tried to get rid of when away from home.

And in an unhappy hour—tired out by domestic misery and hoping to forget, he took again the cards in his hands which he, at his marriage, had sworn never more to touch.

For several weeks he played, with little gain and big losses; until one day everything was gone. In the middle of the night Heinz von Rheden confessed his guilt on his knees at Marie Madeleine's bedside. He was entirely broken down, and his voice drowned in tears. All his fortune, inherited from his father, was gone, but Marie Madeleine, the rich heiress, could and must help him. He hoped she would.

This event at once shook her out of her apathy. She saw with horror the change that had taken place in her home. With her

former energy she took up the reins she had dropped and reminded him of his promise. She was frightened, horrified that it could have gone so far; and she helped him—of course. She helped him a second time, a third time—but all these bitter experiences and agitating scenes at a time when she needed a double share of forbearance and tenderness from her husband made the child-wife ripen in a short time. She who had willingly let herself be led became cold and suspicious and at last hard as stone. She declared that she was not willing to give a penny more. What was left belonged to the little Marie Madeleine. Her father's vice was not to deprive the child of her rightful heritance.

At first he did not believe her. He begged and prayed her by all that was holy to help him this last time and it would never occur again. But at that she laughed and turned her back on him. Without knowing what he did, he raised the riding whip, which he held in his hand, and let it fall on her neck, where it left a red stripe which burned itself into the very soul of the beautiful, proud woman.

On this same evening, not knowing what to do and not able to think a single, clear thought, Heinz von Rheden took the cash of the sporting club of his regiment which had been given into his keeping, went to the Casino and paid his debt. Pale as death he stayed and conversed as usual with his comrades, but in spite of their mockeries he did not touch a card. By the soul of his mother and the head of his child he had sworn to put an end to it. When he came home he would tell Marie Madeleine everything. He thought that now she would have to help him, would be compelled to replace the amount he had "lent"—now that his, her own, and the honour of the child were at stake.

But he was mistaken.

That night, which with its frightful mental agitation might have been the turning-point for the good, everything which hope and love had built up, broke down.

Marie Madeleine had locked her door and she remained deaf and dumb to his cries and knockings. She could not forget the blow with the whip; everything in her body revolted against the man who had so brutally ill-treated her. Her heart seemed a dead stone in her breast—without feeling. heavy as lead. Her love had turned into contempt.

He had to remain alone in his room in order not to arouse the inquisitiveness of the servants, and before he had time to tell Marie Madeleine of his desperate deed, she had secretly, before dawn, left the house with the child.

This last blow stunned him so entirely that he lost his head and told his superior of his fault. Among his comrades the matter could perhaps be hushed up, but as he went to the major, it was impossible. The major, also president of the sports club, was a good-natured man and liked the young officer, but he was painfully exact in everything regarding service. With friendly words he first tried to persuade the nearly-mad man to pull himself together and think of means to amend his deed. Following the advice of the major Heinz von Rheden put his case before a cousin of his dead mother, a relative whom he had taken very little notice of up till now, but who was willing to replace the "lent" sum for his dead cousin's sake.

After having followed his kind heart in this respect the major, as superior officer, let things take their course. Lieutenant Heinz von Rheden had to send in his resignation and could only feel relieved that, thanks to the friendly major, there was no investigation into the painful matter.

Through the old relative of her husband Marie Madeleine learned of all these events.

Impulsively she went to her banker and sold some securities in order to pay back the sum; but when she literally forced the money upon the old man her self-command left her entirely. She was so angry, so deeply wounded in her pride that she could not find words hard enough for the unhappy man and for how he had sinned against her and the child. She would never see him again.

"How could I live with a man for whom I only feel contempt, a man who has lost his honour? How could I love him?" she cried.

The old gentleman looked at her and shook his head.

"You ought not to be so hard, my dear," he said. "You do not know what he has suffered. He judged himself harder than the hardest judge, and his punishment is really heavy enough. . . ."

Marie Madeleine clenched her hands so that the nails cut into the flesh. "It is over now," she said hoarsely.

" You must not say so ! For only the thought of you and the child saved him. He is willing to give his life to make everything good again. If you had seen and heard what I did you would not be so hard."

She did not answer. After a pause she asked indifferently :

"And what is to be done now ? "

" Through a friend I have procured him a situation. It is an inferior one with a small salary, but he was glad to get it all the same. Of course, he will have to work up from the beginning in civil life. There is nothing else for him to do. He has a good will, and is intelligent and energetic. Only—you must let him understand that there is hope for him to earn your forgiveness."

" And where is he now ? "

" In the dynamo factory of Fellhammer and Sons at Breslau. In a big town like that, where everyone is busy earning a living and no one has time to trouble about his neighbour, it will be comparatively easy for him to make his way. If he succeeds in gaining the confidence of his chief I think his future is made. But you must help him."

"And you think I should go back to him now when he is a factory hand . .

" Pardon, my lady, your husband works in the office. Honourable work is no shame ! " said the old gentleman stiffly.

Marie Madeleine shrugged her shoulders.

" It does not matter much, really. If I still loved him—but now—after all that has happened between us—no, I really cannot join him."

The old man stood up. ' Is that your last word ? "

" I do not know what more I could say "

" Then I have no more hope for him, the old man answered slowly and sadly. " The aim of his life was to obtain your forgiveness. In order to gain that no punishment seemed too hard for him and no work too low or degrading.

But I cannot ' Marie Madeleine murmured. " How could I ever forget it ? Forgive him—who has struck me—taken other people's money—impossible !

She shivered and her face was as white as death. The old man thought how much better he could have talked to a weeping woman than to this icy, stony heart.

" We are all sinners my child.

" Yes, but nevertheless we must keep our self-respect

" Do not deprive him of the hope that everything can be made good between you. Think what a severe crisis the man has to go through now mentally as well as physically. Once he is hard at work and has firm ground under his feet, it will be easier for him to pull through. But until then—bear with him. Let him keep the last hope !

Marie Madeleine did not answer ; but there could be no speaking about divorce for a while. She could not forget the old man's sad words so she tolerated her husband's letters, even if she never answered them. Every three months she sent him a short, formal report of the child's health and her progress. That was all.

In this way two long years passed. For the woman they were a spiritual winter sleep —while the man worked with all the strength of both his soul and body. His only thought was : Through—at all costs ! He aged by ten years in that period.

He was now second book-keeper and had a fairly good salary. His chief, who knew his private circumstances and was kindly interested in the man who was determined to build up a new future for himself on the ruins of his former life. He offered him a pretty little flat and advised him to fetch his family.

It was this Marie Madeleine had been waiting for. Now he had found firm ground under his feet he could more easily bear the other thing. She would have her freedom—at all costs ! Her heart did not speak a word for the man, she only longed for freedom, joy, life—it was like a flame that had been kindled in her during this last spring.

¶

ON the morning of her departure a letter arrived. Heinz von Rheden wrote that if she would allow him he would come and fetch her and the child in a week's time. Everything was ready for their arrival. Only —would she write him—if but a line—that she had forgiven him ? He longed for her forgiveness like the lost for their salvation. Only, would she write ! If she did not write, he would not, of course, dare to come.

This letter, which in its simplicity perhaps would have found its way to her heart, she refused to read. It lay unopened in the drawer of her writing-table, and Marie Madeleine was at Breslau enjoying herself.

She was not afraid that she would meet her husband, for she knew that he avoided the town as much as he could.

Out of the loneliness that had been born of her defiance and contempt, she had roused herself to the determination that she would forget all her former life—all that lay behind her, and she would begin life anew. And it seemed, indeed, as if she had only needed the determination to become the gay, careless butterfly-woman once more. She looked optimistically at things and enjoyed life.

She knew that her marriage could never be dissolved after the strict laws of her church, but in her impatience to shake off the hateful chains that held her freedom, she had not greatly considered this question. She now learned that even the civil law code would lay difficulties in her way which she had not thought of before, especially as she did not mention the real cause for her wanting a divorce: the brutal blow with the horse-whip. Proud as she was she did not like to tell her solicitor of that humiliating event; and besides there was perhaps a remnant of consideration within her for her husband. Doctor Hartleben, who fully understood that there was something she hid from him, told her they would never arrive at the goal that way, but she only laughed at him and asked him how it came about that he was called the cleverest lawyer in Breslau if he could not even get a divorce through?

The days passed quickly, Marie Madeleine enjoyed life as she had not done for a long time. Swimming in the broad flood of the pleasures and new impressions of the great town, she was as happy and careless as a child.

Her friend, a good-natured, simple woman, who had her hands full with her small children and her household, could not always accompany her, but she had a comfortable way of letting everyone be happy in their own way. She did not bother Marie Madeleine with questions but let her go and come as she liked. Thus both parties were contented, and it was quite natural that Marie Madeleine's friend and solicitor very often became her ciceron in her visits at the museums and the art galleries of the town as well as her constant companion at concerts and theatres.

This gave these excursions the right value and a fascinating charm.

It seemed to Marie Madeleine as if this man had made her enter into a new world, which had hitherto been unknown to her. He opened the closed doors and showed her all the treasures of art. He taught her to understand the nature and difference of things. He seemed to be familiar with all spheres of knowledge, he could talk of everything from the smallest to the greatest. And how he did talk She listened only too willingly. It was in itself a pleasure to listen to the deep, well-balanced voice—and sometimes she found herself only listening to it, not to the words.

She did not notice that their conversations about business affairs and art treasures often merged into personal matters, that his eyes spoke their own language, and that his hands held hers for longer than the conventional period. She was not aware that between them fine threads were being spun and that her soul was nearly imprisoned by them.

It seemed to her, however, that he had become someone different. He was no longer the man for whom she had had a childish infatuation in her girlhood. Or did she only see him with other eyes? Half ashamed, she remembered that early period in her youth and could not now understand why that dream had been so soon forgotten.

Notwithstanding there was a wonderful charm in this memory, a charm like morning dew on rose leaves or the fine hue on butterfly wings.

That had been the flush of the morning—now the sun was in the zenith and Marie Madeleine was feeling its heat.

To be with this man was for her like a drink of fresh water for which she had been long thirsting—and which made her more thirsty still instead of refreshing her.

And which she could not be without.

She scarcely knew that she only lived during the hours she passed with him, but she felt that life was still beautiful and worth living.

It was a warm evening in May. The air was filled with the fragrance of flowers. Alone Marie Madeleine went to a Strauss concert where she was to meet her friend. She looked very young and charming in her rose-trimmed hat and the elegant, tailor-made costume, which fairly clung to her slim figure. As she took leave of her friends the wife said to her husband:

"Well, I should not be able to stand it! Evening after evening in the theatre to see these modern plays! I would rather

go into a garden concert on such a nice May evening!"

Marie Madeleine knew this and had therefore taken refuge in lies, saying she was going into the theatre.

As she walked along lightly, humming a gay tune, her thoughts were of the evening before in the theatre. Doctor Hartleben had fetched her, and on the way bought her a bunch of narcissus from a begging flower-girl.

"Plebeian flowers, I could wish they were roses, beautiful lady! But the silly thing had none! Light and dark red roses in fine, shaded colours, such as you wear in your hat! Oh, you know well what suits your face!"

She fixed the abused white flowers between the laces of her dress. "Narcissus—they are my pet flowers!"

He looked at her and smiled.

"Really? And do you know what these flowers mean?"

"Innocence, purity of heart!" she answered harmlessly. "I have painted them so often and each time I have remembered the little cloister church where, as children, we used to put big bunches of white narcissus on the Virgin's altar in the month of May."

"Quite right," he answered sarcastically. "And the lily is also the symbol of innocence, is it not so? How well both these flowers deserve their reputation—with their oppressive, stupefying scent! Do you know the poem about the narcissus?"

"No."

"Then I will send it you to-morrow. But you must promise me to read it."

"Of course."

Marie Madeleine breathed the sweet flower scent and found it at once very queer that the narcissus were called the flowers of innocence.

¶

THEN followed the theatre, and when he saw her home he asked her to come to the Strauss concert next evening. "But for heaven's sake, alone!" he begged.

Very early the following morning—she was still in bed—the servant girl brought her an elegant bouquet of auricula-coloured velvety orchids with white narcissus, a perfection of the florist's art. With the flowers came a book, containing poems by a modern author. No letter—no card—but she knew from whom the precious gift came and stretched out her hand after the book. A mark was put between the pages:

> Do you still remember that warm night in May,
> When in love's sweet madness at your feet I lay,
> And we gave each other hot, burning kisses,
> All around us swayed—pale, white narcissus.

Lying in bed Marie Madeleine read the poem to an end. She read it again and again till her forehead was wet with perspiration. She turned the leaves and breathed the bachic lust of life, which, hot and sensual, burst forth from these pages that never before had been in her hands. Was this life? And she had already taken leave of this sweet wonderful life? At twenty-five she had cut herself off from all the joys and pleasures of youth.

And the "pale, white" narcissus filled the room with their strong, intoxicating sweet odour. Marie Madeleine bent her face over them and literally became drunk with it—the whole day she went about like one in a dream, waiting for the evening and yet fearing it, while the words of the poem in spite of herself repeated themselves in her ears over and over again "Do you still remember . . "

And now she walked swiftly along the straight lane in the suburb to the place where she was going to take the tram. Now and then she looked anxiously at the sky which, during the last minutes, had turned very dark. She had only the little white lace parasol which made such a pretty background to her rose-trimmed hat, and now the first heavy raindrops began to fall. She looked about her. She was very far from any houses and far from the tramway depot. She opened the white parasol and hastened along an endless, grey wall which enclosed an enormously large block of buildings—the cloister of the Merciful Brethren. It was, of course, closed to women, but the church beside it would perhaps be open.

As Marie Madeleine hastened forward the lightning struck out from a blue-grey cloud; far away the first thunder began—clouds of dust and fine stones rolled along the road—and just as she ran up the door-steps of the church the thunderstorm broke out in full force. The door of the church was being opened by a monk. She passed him and breathlessly sunk down in one of the back pews.

How quiet it was here—and what a lot of

flowers! What colours! White, yellow and red—a whole terrace of flowers built up before the image of the Virgin, and a faint smell of incense lies like a veil between the columns. Ah—well—it was the month of May!

How long it was since Marie Madeleine entered a church! Not since the misfortune broke over her had she been in one. It had hardened her—she had forgotten to pray.

Almost inquisitively she looked around her; mechanically her eyes followed the churchwarden who went about arranging the flowers, smoothing out the altar cloth, putting a candlestick in its proper place, etc. The rain beat against the windows—and on the roof it rolled like waves from the sea. A pale twilight filled the church, only lighted now and then by blue and yellow lightning. Before the high altar the eternal lamp burned, and beside the image of the Virgin a red light which the air through an open window near by constantly swayed to and fro.

Marie Madeleine smoothed out her dress. Thank God she was dry. She listened to the rain—if it continued for long what would then become of the Strauss concert and their being together which she had longed for the whole day? If she only had taken a cab—how silly it had been of her to be so eager to hide her plans! Here were the consequences—a lost evening!

It did not occur to Marie Madeleine to pray. She considered the church only as a shelter from the rain, a quiet shelter where she could think without being disturbed. Think! She was so agitated that she could scarcely keep her thoughts together. And in all this confusion she heard the constant humming: "Do you still remember . . . pale, white narcissus . . ."

As though compelled she raised her eyes. Ah, yes—on both sides of the Mother of God were high vases filled with narcissus. One could feel their smell through the whole church in the hot, oppressive air. She leaned back and closed her eyes. She pictured how he would wait for her, wait and become impatient when she did not arrive punctually—and continue to wait. What did he want really? Yes—and what did she want? Freedom—yes—to be free again in order to marry the other, this friend from her first girlhood. Did she love him then? She had not thought of it. Love? She felt an uncertain longing, a feverish thirst after joy and life and pleasures—after everything she had had formerly and lost entirely. But—how could he send her the book about the white narcissus—and with all these wild, sensual poems . . .? The blood mounted to her cheeks when she thought of it. She would have to thank him for the flowers—and if he then looked at her as he had done yesterday before her door—God, what was she to do?

All at once her thoughts were of her husband — their wedding — their wedding trip—and she understood that at that time she had been a mere child meekly doing everything that was asked of her, who did not in the least understand how sweet, how wonderful life could be for people who understood how to live it.

But since that time she had been awakened. The other—her friend—had awakened her slumbering passion. He held her soul in his hands. She shivered at this thought. How had it come about? How—in what way had he stolen himself into her heart? Through the poem? If she were free—if he were her husband—she played with the thought and pictured how a marriage with him would be. And the while she breathed the heavy smell of the flowers, and the poem repeated itself constantly in her brain.

With closed eyes and hands folded in her lap Marie Madeleine continued to dream. She forgot her surroundings. She did not know whether it was the cold of the church, but she shivered again and again, her cheeks were burning and her lips dry as in fever.

And the rain continued to fall.

The big church door creaked on its hinges. Wet figures filed into the church. The churchwarden lighted the candles: high, thick wax candles in heavy bronze candlesticks. Someone with a dripping umbrella and wet clothes sat down in the seat beside Marie Madeleine. She opened her eyes and looked about her. She saw where she was—and her hot feverish dreams left her.

She raised her eyes. On a cloud, and irradiated by a golden light, she saw a woman at the feet of a man in shining dress whose right hand clasped a cross. And the woman was on her knees—with her head bent backwards and her face lifted upwards with something indescribably lofty and supernatural in its expression—mother love, humble self-forgetting, eagerly pleading—held both arms outstretched and seemed to pray.

Pray—for whom?

Marie Madeleine concentrated her seeing powers in order to perceive what was underneath the woman's pleading arms.

And now she saw it. It seemed to grow out of the twilight: houses, thronged together, flat roofs, high towers, a big wall—it was the very cloister of the Merciful Brethren—the church, in which these poor, thirsty, wet persons were lying on their knees; the children, the old men, the women and workmen, tired out by hard work—and herself with her hot, confused, earthly thoughts.

For them the mother of heaven prayed.

For her too?

And for what?

Marie Madeleine, who had not prayed for years because her heart had been too hard, sank down, in spite of herself, on her knees and folded her hands upon the bench, brown from age, where thousands and thousands of hands for generations had folded themselves in pain and in thankful joy.

Memories from their childhood awakened within her; her sunny youth with the friendly nuns, the time when she and her comrades had decorated the Marie altar or the altar of the Virgin with flowers—with white narcissus.

"Do you still remember . . .

She shivered—why could she not get the dreadful poem out of her head? A clock chimed—the organ began to play—clear, quiet, strong, the song of the monks rang out in the little church.

"*Ora pro nobis.*"

She listened breathlessly.

The song grew stronger. It seemed like a flood of many streaming waters, such a stream that breaks down everything on its way. The voices of the children, of the old men, the sighs and sobbings from the women mixed with it and grew to a cry for help which mounted to her who lay with outstretched arms and prayed for them.

Again and again Marie Madeleine had to look up to the picture. It seized her heart in a hard grip. She could not remember ever before in her life having been so impressed by any picture. It seemed to live, to breathe; it seemed to speak with the tongues of angels and men at the same time. But in the fever, thirst, and uproar of her heart she did not understand what the voices said.

As in a vision she saw herself on her knees among the poor people, and it seemed to her as if she must cry out to the holy mother about the pain of her heart—pray like the others did.

Yes, yes, she would pray for all that for which her heart longed: joy, happiness, love for all that whereafter she had longed the whole day.

"*Sancta Maria—ora pro nobis*——"

Like the roar of waves, rising and falling, the song flowed past her ears. Mechanically she repeated the responses, seeking for words for that which struggles and sobs within her.

"*Mater purissima—mater castissima*——"

Thou mother of purity—thou mother of chastity—— Ah, what does she know the heavenly mother about the earthly longings for happiness of an earthly woman? How can the Virgin comprehend this? And beg for it? And give it?

And still! Is she not full of pity, full of mercy; does she not beg for us all?

"Hear me, mother of heaven, give me back my happiness—love, the sun of life . . . let me have it . . . only once more . . ."

Then—as she for the first time finds words for her secret thoughts—something indescribable happens. Was it a vision—perhaps only the flaming of the lightning outside or the swaying of a light—but it seemed to the excited woman as if the holy mother turned her head and looked at her with a pale, angry face. Her lips seemed to move—in condemnation.

It was only a second—but in this second the scale fell suddenly from Marie Madeleine's eyes, and with horror she perceived the abyss at the edge of which she was standing.

Holy God, what had she done—where had she gone?

Pray—pray—for something which is a heavy sin! Add a new sin to the others. She had blasphemed God!

¶

TOTALLY crushed, Marie Madeleine remained on her knees. From afar she hears the voices of the monks, but she cannot discern the words—and like one drowning she sees pictures from her whole life in a swift panorama pass before the eyes of her soul.

Her innocent childhood in the cloister, her gay girlhood days, her short, sunny engagement time, her marriage. Suddenly the fair hair of a child rises before her—it

is so pure, so sweet—and at once she feels as if this child—her child—were the only one on earth who could save her.

How could she have met those innocent eyes if she had gone to the rendezvous in the hunger after love and joy in which she had wandered about the whole day! Would she have been able to withstand the man who held her soul in his hands?

Her soul? No, no—Marie Madeleine set her teeth together not to cry out aloud. He had only poisoned her senses with his sensual ways and his sensual poems.

She clutched her hands so that the nails entered the flesh.

"*Refugium peccatorum.*" The refuge of sinners.

Marie Madeleine raised her head and looked with guilty eyes up to Her who is rich in mercy: "Help me, what ought I to do?"

And now the picture speaks to her with its tongues of angels and men, which Marie Madeleine had not understood before, because they were drowned in the flood of her passions. Turn back, Marie Madeleine! Cling to your child! Do your duty!"

"But *what* am I to do?"

"Go back to him whom thou hast given your oath till death will part you."

"I cannot!"

"You must!"

"I cannot. I have lost love, esteem. He has lost his honour—how can I esteem him?"

"He has lost his honour—and thou?"

"And I?"

"Yes. What did you pray for just now? Where did you intend to go this evening? Is not your honour stained by your sinful thoughts? He lost his honour through the deed of a moment, driven to it through despair and bad luck. You are not less guilty than he, for you did not break your oath to him in a moment but for days, weeks, in your thoughts."

A groan broke from the lips of the woman. She pressed her hands to her face and wept bitterly.

Has she lost her honour? She who had looked down on her husband with such contempt because in an outbreak of madness he stretched out his hands after other people's property. She who had spoken so proudly of her self respect to his old relative—to what had she come?

Was not the holy mother right in her accusation?

Oh, who could save her, who could give her back her pride, her self respect without which she could not live? It had been her support in her lonely life.

"Thy rod and thy staff!" a solemn voice repeated.

Ah—she understood—and through her heart that had been hardened by contempt and defiance a deep glowing furrow was ploughed by the consciousness of her own guilt.

Her thoughts pass to the letter which arrived on the morning of the day she departed and which still lies at home in the upper drawer of her writing-table. Her husband—who worked in the office of a factory outside this very town—what had he to tell her?

"Thy rod and thy staff"—yes, so it ought to be—but it never could. What should she do? She did not know—but one thing she knew for certain. She would not go to the rendezvous in the town—never more would she see her friend—she would go home to-morrow morning by the first train. She would read his letter and perhaps—answer it. She would hold her child in her arms and kiss her lips, her eyes. She would answer all the little girl's questions and then—perhaps . . .

No. The old defiance awakened within her.

Forgive him—yes. But go back to him—never!

With this thought she stepped out of the church. The rain had ceased and big drops of water hung on bushes and leaves. Marie Madeleine breathed the fresh air deeply. It was very soothing to her eyes, which were red and swollen with weeping. As she went down the little path from the cloister to the street she stopped suddenly. A carriage had slowly approached the cloister and stopped at its door. Inquisitive people thronged about it. A man was lifted out—a workman in torn bloodstained clothes and his arms and head bound up with bandages. He was carried up the doorsteps into the cloister. It was a man who had had an accident and he was brought to the Merciful Brethren to be nursed. Marie Madeleine sighed—yes, such things happen every day in a great town like this. Perhaps a mason who had fallen from his ladder or a man who had been run over by a motor-car or the electric tram. But the people were still standing at the door; excited questions were heard, someone wept loudly. More

people came rushing up and in a second the place before the cloister was crowded with an excited mass of people.

Two women thrust Marie Madeleine aside and nearly knocked her down in their haste to pass her.

"They will bring several more," said the one breathlessly. "Did you hear the explosion? A dreadful accident . . . out there in the dynamo-factory . . ."

The white parasol in Marie Madeleine's hands fell to the ground, but she did not notice it. Her knees shook and would not carry her, she bit her lips not to cry out aloud.

In the dynamo factory! There were two such factories in the town. She went after the woman and took her by the arm.

"In which factory? Where?"

Unwillingly the woman shook her arm free and stared into the pale, anxious face.

"Ah, well, does it hit one of your class for once?" she cried scornfully. "I thought that misery and misfortune were only good enough for us. But let us go, there they bring another!"

The other woman had more pity.

"The accident happened in the dynamo factory of Fellhammer & Sons. In the suburb of Nicolai."

Fellhammer & Sons—the factory where Heinz worked!

¶

WITH the strength of a mad woman Marie Madeleine worked her way through the throng. She was turned back, scolded—she did not hear or care. Finally she reached the portal where she broke down.

"Back—they are bringing another!"

With an iron hand the policeman pushed her back, put his broad figure between her and the open door. A quiet body is carried up the steps . . . and one more . . .

She dropped down on her knees.

"For God's sake, let me see if my husband is among them . . ."

The policeman feels her fingers about his arm. Something human moves his heart. He turns round and helps her up.

"She wants to see if her husband is among the wounded. . . . Let her come in . . . but you must keep quiet, my lady, not weep, not cry! The brethren have their hands full of the unhappy wounded!"

An old cloister brother has pity on her and leads her into the hall where one after the other is being laid down—bleeding groaning, unconscious with distorted faces, blackened by smoke—a horrible sight.

Heinz von Rheden was not among them.

But here is an overseer, who has accompanied the sad transport . . . perhaps he knows . . .

But the bewildered man could not answer much of the monk's quiet questions. The wounded were all brought there . . . but at the factory were many dead. Some might be under the ruins, one had not had time to seek them out. Mr. Von Rheden? The book-keeper? Well, he had seen him to-day, but he cannot say whether it was before or after the accident.

Someone fetched a cab and Marie Madeleine drove the endless long way through the town and out to the factory.

On the promenade a gay elegant crowd thronged. Among the green fresh leaves electric lamps are lighted—the band plays. Some of the melodies catch her ear—well-known melodies—sweet and intoxicating—"Stories from the Wiener Forest"——For a moment Marie Madeleine raised her head and stared. Yes, it was the Strauss concert. Great God, they play here and do not know anything yet—think, if she had been sitting there—at his side—in this night—when her husband was perhaps already dead—how horrible!

Her husband, to whom she was still bound by the chains of law—by the chains of law only? She starts. It seems as if something was taking hold of her and tried to hold her firmly. She cannot understand herself. What is it then which throbs and hammers within her? What has come over her? So suddenly against her will.

Had she not broken with him for ever? Would she not like to be free?

Free—and if she had been free in this moment—if her sinful prayer had been heard?

Great God, how thankful she was that she was still bound!

She urged the driver to drive faster and faster. Never will she forget this painful drive. With the grinding of wheels on the gravel of the road mixed the constant ever repeating words in her brain: "It is all over, all over, he is dead, he is dead!"

It hummed as insistently as before during the day the poem had done: "Do you still remember . . ."

She presses her hands to her temples in order not to think; but she must, she

cannot get away from the restless, penetrating pain. And into the deep furrow which her consciousness of guilt has ploughed fell the seed of repentance. Out of her agony grows a weak, feeble plant and turns its head towards the sun: the merciful, atoning, forgiving love.

At last they reach the factory. Passing through weeping and crying people, smoking ruins and men from the fire brigade working feverishly Marie Madeleine reaches the director's house.

An old lady with white hair listened in astonishment to her stammered questions, then she took her by the hand and led her through a long passage, speaking to her and trying to comfort her.

" He lives—my dear lady—certainly your husband lives! But he is severely wounded. We have kept him here, our family doctor is looking after him. Now try to be strong, I will support you. You shall know everything. He was not wounded—most of the people in the office were not. But you will understand that everyone who had hands afterwards helped to rescue the unhappy ones. Your husband was just fetching out a workwoman from under the ruins. Explosions were still heard here and there and he was warned, but he did not like to leave the unhappy woman to her fate. Then the second explosion happened. And when they took him up in the corner where he had fallen with his burden his right hand was gone."

A door is opened and through a mist Marie Madeleine sees three gentlemen standing about a bed—the doctor in white shirtsleeves — bloodstained bandages and water basins on the floor—and in the bed—a quiet figure with broad, white bandages about head and arms.

At a word from the old lady the three gentlemen stepped back from the bed—and with a cry of pain which she could not suppress Marie Madeleine stumbled forward and fell on her knees beside the bed.

Out of the bandages two feverish eyes looked down at her—bewilderingly at first—but then a beam of clear consciousness shoots through the semi-stupor in which he is lying.

" Marie Madeleine—you? " A feeble stammering of joy, a faint glow on the fevered cheeks, and in a scarcely perceptible whisper he added: " Now it is gone, the right hand—the hand that took the money—the hand that beat you—it is gone for ever! Can you forgive me now? "

" Heinz! " she sobbed and hid her face in the pillows not to cry aloud.

Quietly the others went out—they felt, perhaps, that in this hour there was no place for any of them between husband and wife.

Very late that evening the chief spoke to Marie Madeleine. Only a few words.

" He has been my right hand in these last few months, and I shall see that he remains that in the future, in spite of his right hand having been blown off! A man like him works with the brain and the heart."

Early the next morning Marie Madeleine's mother received a telegram:

*Heinz had an accident. I am nursing him. Bring the child here to us.*

Deadly frightened, the old lady read the telegram. While her shaking hands prepared the child and herself for the journey, the child asked impatiently for the tenth time:

"Are we going to father, grandmother? Is he well now? "

" No, my darling, he is very ill."

" But he will soon recover, grandma, will he not? And come back to us? "

" We hope that they both will recover, my child," sighed the old lady.

" Mother, too? Has she been ill then? "

" Very ill."

"And is she better now? Then we shall be together, all of us, grandma? "

The innocent words of the child touched the old lady in her innermost soul. She nodded and tried to smile while tears were running over her withered face.

" If God so will—always—my darling! "

*(Another Great Love Story will appear in next month's Argosy.)*

# The Catchpoll

*A fifty-guinea wager and a very wily highwayman*

By RAFAEL SABATINI

MR. WITHERINGTON was a young man of fashion in search of stimulants for a jaded appetite. Fed to a surfeit upon town fare of rout and masque, cards and dice, Ranelagh and the Ring, he took coach for the country and hoped that he might have adventures.

Realisation of his hopes followed swiftly although the quality of his first adventure was hardly as romantic and heroic as he desired. On the dusty highway that winds along the water-meadows of the Meon, in the pleasant county of Hampshire, the progress of his chaise was stayed by a horseman of the most engaging and acquisitive manners that it had ever been Mr. Witherington's fortune to encounter. This horseman, whose features were concealed by a square of crêpe, invited our gentleman to surrender his purse, his rings, his watch, the diamond clasp of his solitaire, and such other trifles as are commonly affected by men of fashion.

Mr. Witherington, as you shall presently have ample opportunity of judging, was a man of spirit. He laid down the book he was reading—it happened to be Horace, though I confess that the "Gull's Hornbook" would have been in better case to serve him just then—he laid down his Horace, then, and snatched up a brace of barkers which he carried ready for such an emergency. Armed thus, he faced his first adventure.

I hope you will weep with me over the sequel, and confess that so pretty a fellow with so high a spirit deserved better of Fate.

Mr. Witherington incontinently fired both pistols point-blank at that scarlet-coated tobyman, but the rascal never so much as flinched under the fire. He sat his nag, unmoved and apparently unconcerned, and the nag—a roan mare with a white blaze—seemed as unperturbed as her rider. While Mr. Witherington stared, chapfallen and dumbfounded by this ineffectiveness of his charges, the gentleman of the pad walked his mare up to the chaise.

"Now that ye've vented your heat, sir," said he, "perhaps you'll come to business!"

And he put out his hat to our traveller very deferentially—much, indeed, as the plate is put forth at church.

Mr. Witherington was a man of keen imagination, and where another might have gone intrigued for ever, he instantly resolved this riddle. He bethought him of an inn some five miles back where he had stayed to dine, and registered a vow that when dining at country inns in future he would remember to take his pistols with him, instead of leaving them in the chaise within the reach of any passing rogue who desired to draw the charges. He was also something of a philosopher, and he knew how to accept a situation. He accepted this one, and purchased at considerable cost the right to resume his journey.

When they had left the tobyman a good mile behind them, Mr. Witherington, very sore in spite of his philosophy, put his head from the window of the chaise, and, holding down his glossy black wig with a beautiful hand that the tobyman had stripped of two historic rings, he hailed the postilion.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Hi! Who may be the plaguey sheriff of this thief-ridden country?"

The postilion eased the pace and turned in his saddle.

"Sir Thomas Blount, sir."

"And where the plague does this Sir Thomas Blount live, if so be that he is alive at all?" quoth our man of fashion.

"At Fareham, sir."

"Fareham!" said Mr. Witherington with a noble scorn. "And what may that be—a town, a village, or a pig-sty?"

Apparently the postilion himself was not sufficiently well-informed on the point to supply a direct answer.

" 'Tis but some four mile away," he evaded.

This, however, was just the information Mr. Witherington required.

" Take me there," said he. " To Sir Thomas Blount's," he added: and sank back to consider what he should say to Sir Thomas when they met.

Had the distance been greater, there is no saying to what heights of virulent eloquence he might have soared. As it was, the things he told the sheriff, when they came face to face, touching the condition of his shire were such as set Sir Thomas breathing very gustily; and this although at first the sheriff did not grasp that Mr. Witherington's discourse aimed at casting scorn upon his efficiency. Sir Thomas himself had suffered, both personally and officially, at the hands of that same knight of the pad; and, since a common ill is a sure bond of sympathy, he was at first disposed to be friendly to his supercilious visitor.

" 'Twill be that blamed Welshman, Captain Evans!" he burst out. " Did he wear a scarlet coat and a red wig, and ride a roan mare with a white blaze?"

" I see that ye're well acquainted with him," said Mr. Witherington. " Like enough he'll be a friend of yours."

The sheriff, a portly, florid gentleman, caught the sarcasm, but misunderstood its aim. He smiled grimly.

" Let me but lay hands on him, and I'll prove the warmth of my friendship, egad! 'Tis the most cursed, impudent and wily rogue that ever came out of Wales. He has the cunning of twenty devils. They laid him by the heels once in Shropshire, but he was too slippery for them. The fools couldn't hold him when they had him. There was a constable and six men taking him to Shrewsbury Gaol, with his feet tied under the belly of his horse, and as they came along a country lane our rascal sees a pheasant perched in a tree. He heaves a melancholy sigh, and cocks a melancholy eye at the bird.

" ' I mind the time I used to go a-fowling,' says he in a maudlin voice. ' D'ye know I've never in my life missed a bird, whether it was perched or in flight.' Then he sighed again. ' Pity to let that one bide,' says he, ' a fine plump fowl that would make a savoury supper for a poor man.' "

" Now this set that fool of a constable a-watering at the mouth, as our rascal had reckoned it would. ' D'ye think ye could bring that one down?' he asks. Evans looks him over with an eye of scorn. ' Blindfolded,' says he, and reins in his horse. The constable reins in, too. ' About it, then,' says the fool, and hands his fowling-piece to that scoundrel. And what think you, sir, the fellow did?"

" Nothing in human folly could surprise me," answered Mr. Witherington, from the chill heights of his dignity, dissembling his interest in the story.

" He clapped the fowling-piece to the constable's head and swore to blow his brains out unless his men instantly threw down their weapons. They obeyed him. And when next he commanded them to come and unbind him, they also obeyed him. Then he took a brace of pistols and the best horse in the company—the same roan mare upon which you beheld him—and rode off to come and plague us here in Hampshire."

Mr. Witherington began to laugh.

" 'Tis no matter for laughter," the sheriff reproved him. " D'ye know that he has had the infernal impudence to rob me—the sheriff!" And Sir Thomas tapped his chest that the visitor might have no doubt that it was himself he meant. " He robbed me of a purse of twenty guineas and a watch and a diamond monogram—a watch that was given to me by the Lord-Lieutenant of the county. Ay, and there's worse than that against him."

" Oh, impossible!" said the ironic Mr. Witherington.

" You shall judge. 'Twas a fortnight since on the Portsmouth Road. He had an accomplice on that occasion, a man which they say is his brother. The thieving twain came upon a posse of constables leading some forty men they had impressed into the King's service, which they were taking to Portsmouth. Evans rode beside them awhile, engaged them in talk, and enquired for what misdeed these fellows had been taken. The constables, never suspecting them, explained the matter, adding that they had received ten shillings for every man impressed. Thereupon Evans and his brother whipped out their barkers, disarmed the constables, took every shilling from them, and then, with the assistance of the pressed men, whom they had released, they tied up the constables neck and heel, and rolled them into the ditch. That, sir, is to rob the King," he ended.

Mr. Witherington crossed his legs, and took snuff deliberately from a gold box that had survived his encounter with the captain.

"'Tis very discreditable, sir," he said languidly, dusting his ruffles, "that such a dog should continue to prowl the highways."

The sheriff's eyes narrowed as he considered our gentleman, so spruce and dainty, from his glossy black wig to his boots of Spanish leather. At last he began to sniff the fellow's real humour. But he kept his temper.

"I confess it, sir," said he. "But from what I've told you, you'll see that the rogue is as slippery as an eel. He has made friends with every drawer, waiter, and ostler between Portsmouth and Guildford, and there's naught happens in the county but he's informed of it."

"Bah!" said Mr. Witherington, rudely. "A pretty state of things."

The sheriff's temper began to rise.

"No doubt, sir, you could mend it if you had my office," said he, developing sarcasm in his turn.

"No doubt at all," said Mr. Witherington, rising. "'Tis a matter that asks but little address, though more, perhaps, than is at the command of—of your blundering constables. But—pish!" he shrugged. "I'll clear the highways of this gadfly in a week."

"You would?" the sheriff's face turned the colour of claret. "You would? Then why not essay it?"

Mr. Witherington, stiff and erect, gave the sheriff a cold stare.

"Gad, sir, I am no catchpoll."

"Ah!" said the sheriff. "Are you anything at all, Mr. Witherington?"

"Sir! Sir! I'll trouble you to be more explicit."

"I mean, sir, have you ever in all your life done anything but boast of what ye might do?"

Our man of fashion reddened slowly under the other's obvious scorn.

"Ye think I'm boastful?" he said slowly, more amazement than anger in his voice.

"By what other name d'ye call it, to come telling a man that his work is ill done, and that ye could do it better, whilst refusing to put your own skill to the test?"

Mr. Witherington became thoughtful. Then: "Why not?" he muttered. And again: "Why not?" He laughed. "Sir," he said, "I sought the country in quest of adventures to enliven a dull life. You offer me the chance of one. Moreover, I am afraid there is some truth in what you say, and I will not lie under the imputation that I boast of more than I am ready to perform. A boaster! 'Slife, 'tis a vile thing to be. I'll purge myself of the taint by performing no less than I boasted."

"Ye mean——" quoth Sir Thomas, very surprised.

"If ye'll lay me a wager of fifty guineas that I do not bring this knave to you within a week, bound neck and heel, I'll set about his capture this very instant."

"You?" quoth the sheriff, and stared, round-eyed. Then his glance narrowed suddenly. He was guilty of what was almost a dishonesty, but it must be admitted that he was spurred to it by the other's manner. He had that morning received authority to issue a proclamation offering a hundred guineas for the capture of Captain Evans. If he accepted the wager proposed by Mr. Witherington, he must make fifty guineas in either case, and should the captain be taken—a contingency he could hardly account likely—his ends would be still better served. Therefore he presently agreed, and Mr. Witherington set out upon his journey with twenty guineas in his pocket that he had borrowed from Sir Thomas.

¶

IT was only three days later that at last he got on the trail of Captain Evans. The latter had proved far from easy. Evans had as great a talent for keeping out of the way when he was wanted as for turning up when he was not. To achieve his object, Mr. Witherington was forced to take people into his confidence, and although he was careful to say no more than his needs demanded, yet he found it necessary to say a good deal more than he desired. He was rewarded, however, in the end by positive information of the tobyman's whereabouts, and dismayed at the same time to learn that a certain Baldock—a Bow Street messenger, famous as the astutest thief-taker in the country—was also hot upon the trail.

His informant was an ingenious young country squire whom he had met at the Trojan House at Petersfield, a man who had been one of Captain Evans' victims, and whose resentment against the tobyman was

rivalled only by his fear of him. Yet he would show our gentleman where and how the captain might be snared, though himself he would have no hand in it.

Since Baldock was on the trail there was need for haste if Mr. Witherington would not be forestalled, and so our gallant buck set out forthwith under the young squire's guidance.

Baldock had heard in town of the reward that was being offered, and had obtained not only leave but encouragement to make an attempt to earn it. He visited Sir Thomas a few hours after Mr. Witherington had left the sheriff's house, announcing the business that had brought him to Hampshire.

Now, it could not matter to the sheriff whether Baldock or Mr. Witherington succeeded, for the sheriff, as we know, stood to make fifty guineas in either case. But for the sake of fair play he deemed it well to advise Baldock of the circumstances under which another was ahead of him already upon the quest.

When Baldock heard that his rival was the notorious buck Witherington—well-known to him by reputation, he was indeed to all the town—he laughed as though the world had never held so choice a jest, and departed about his catchpoll business with no faintest doubt to cloud his prospective enjoyment of the prize money.

Baldock, a sturdy fellow of middle height, with the jaw of a bulldog and the thews of a blacksmith, was attended by a brace of scoundrels who, under his suasion, had deserted from the army of priggers to join the sleuths of Bow Street. They were, of course, his underlings, his lackeys, as it were, in this thief-taking business; but they were, to the extent of ten guineas apiece, his partners in the venture of the capturing of Captain Evans and the Government reward. They travelled under the guise of a bagman and his 'prentices, and in this fashion wandered from town to town and inn to inn throughout the county of Hampshire, Baldock sniffing diligently everywhere to pick up the trail of his quarry. And, although he had no fear of being anticipated by Mr. Witherington, yet to make quite sure of our gentleman's failure he set about fouling his chances by putting abroad the story of the wager among the folk he thought could be trusted to report it to Captain Evans.

Baldock, you see, was a quite unscrupulous rogue. He also reasoned that to throw Captain Evans on his guard against Mr. Witherington might serve to throw him off his guard where Baldock himself was concerned. Nevertheless, Baldock's scheming and searching went entirely unsuccessful for four whole days. Captain Evans had gone to earth like a fox when the hounds are out, and not all Baldock's ferreting and questioning could elicit him the merest clue.

This, after all, is not in the least surprising when you remember the good feeling that notoriously existed between the tobyman and every inn servant in Hampshire, and when I add that the false bagman's real trade was writ large all over him.

As day succeeded day, and Baldock had failed to strike the slightest indication of a trail, his spirits had gradually sunk, together with his confidence; the hundred-guinea horizon on which he had kept his eyes grew daily more and more distant. Thus four days sped, and then, on the evening of the fourth, just as his hopes were touching their nadir, something happened—the very last thing that Master Baldock had expected.

He was sitting by the window of the Lame Dog at Liphook, moodily watching the sunset and sharing a jug of small ale with his satellites, when into the sanded taproom seeps a young buck, who, by the very radiance of his presence—from his glossy black wig to his riding boots of fine Spanish leather—made the place seem dingier than it was.

Whilst the three thief-takers eyed him in astonishment, the new-comer advanced towards them, flung laced coat and three-cornered hat across a stool, pulled up another, and sitting down at their table, without as much as a by-your-leave, desired them to do him the honour of drinking a jug of huckle-my-butt at his expense. Then, without waiting for their consent, he bawled for the landlord and issued his order, sharp and curtly like one who has the habit of command.

Recovering from his astonishment, Baldock at last addressed the man of fashion, at once with dignity and a tinge of irony; for our Baldock was in his way a man of the world not easily put out of countenance.

"Ecod, sir," said he, "we're vastly honoured to be sure; but would it be an impertinence to enquire the name of our Amphitryon?"

The buck stared.

"Amphitryon!" says he. 'Why, sink me now—a man of wit and learning as I live! 'Twas not to be looked for in one of your calling."

"My calling?" quoth Baldock, his brows narrowing. "What a plague may you know of my calling?"

"Why, no more than I have from the landlord, and no more than I can see for myself. I have eyes and he has eyes, and, faith, I can see as far through a bagman's pack as many another."

To Baldock, vain of his disguise, and assured of its impenetrability, this was bitter medicine. Was his real trade, then to be detected by the first mincing macaroni who raised a quizzing-glass to scrutinise him?

¶

AS an antidote, the steaming bowl of huckle-my-butt arrived at that moment. Silence prevailed whilst the landlord ladled out four cups of it and until he had again withdrawn. Then our fine gentleman raised his mug.

"Sir, if you are what I take you to be, then we're very choicely met, and I drink to our meeting."

"My service, sir," said Baldock civilly; and the like was muttered by his followers, ere they fell to their greedy and noisy guzzling of the savoury brew.

The buck set down his cup, flashed out a little square of lace and cambric and padded his lips with it very daintily.

"And now, sir," said he, "I beg that ye'll deal frankly with me, for if ye're the men I take you for, I am in urgent need of you. In a word, now, are you from Bow Street?"

Baldock hesitated, scanning the frank and rather effeminate face of his questioner. He thrust back his wig an inch that he might scratch his head, as if to express his perplexity.

"Ye haven't honoured us with your own name yet, sir," said he at last.

"True," said the other. "My name is Witherington—Henry Witherington. Ye'll hardly have heard of me."

But light had broken now upon the mind of Baldock. He brought his fist down with a thud upon the greasy table, cursing his dull wits that he had not guessed the truth. Then he stared long at our fine gentleman, and finally burst into a great hoarse laugh.

'Eard o' ye!" he choked. "Blood and 'ounds! You're him what undertook to catch Tom Evans. Ha, ha! You! Ha, ha!"

He held his sides, and squirmed as if a convulsion had seized him. His satellites perceived the humour of it no less, and in a moment the three of them were rocking and shrieking hilariously, whilst ever and anon a limp, mocking hand would be flung out at our gentleman to feed the derision.

"And—and how fares the adventure?" cried Baldock at last, tears streaming down his mirth-inflamed cheeks.

Our gentleman sat in a frozen dignity, eyeing them with cold scorn.

"It is accomplished," he said.

He said just that, and no more, but in all conscience it was enough. It cropped their mirth short, damned it up in full flow, and laid them silent and gaping like stranded fish.

"Ac-complished?" faltered one of them.

Slowly the colour perished in Baldock's face.

"D'ye mean ye've done it—ye've got him?" he grasped.

"Bound neck and foot as I wagered Sir Thomas," said the buck, tightening his lips as he watched them, relishing to the full his victory over these foolish deriders.

"Ecod!" said Baldock, and "Ecod!" said each of his greasy followers.

The evaporation of the hundred guineas which the thief-taker had set out so confidently to earn was now complete, and it was this mincing dandy from Ranelagh who had forestalled him. It was incredible. He said so.

"Gad! 'Tis impossible. I'll not believe it!" he roared in sudden rebellion; and his men took heart again.

But Mr. Witherington smiled as he drew from his pocket a fine gold watch. He turned it over and displayed to Baldock's staring eyes a monogram wrought in diamonds.

"Likely this will convince you," said he. "Ye'll have heard of the watch of which the captain robbed Sir Thomas. It was still upon the rascal when I took him."

Baldock looked at the intertwined T and B, and conviction—a sickening conviction—stole gradually upon his mind to banish thence his last obstinate hope. He grew surly.

"Well, well," said he, "if ye've taken him, 'tis your own affair, to be sure. Ye'll

need to hold him, too, and Captain Evans needs a deal of holding."

Our gentleman returned the watch to his fob, and drew forth a gold snuff-box.

"That," he said, "is where I require your assistance. Likely you mistake me. I am no catchpoll. What I have done I have done for a wager of fifty guineas and to show your sheriff what should have been done long since by one who understood his duties to his shire. Likely there will be a reward for the apprehension of this rascal. That does not concern me."

Baldock took heart again. More; his spirits soared to the altitudes they had inhabited when first he had started upon this quest. So much good fortune seemed incredible. Here was this dangerous and slippery Captain Evans laid by the heels for him, with no trouble to himself, and he had no more to do now than just to go and fetch him and then claim the reward.

"D'ye say ye want none of the reward?" he asked.

The other shrugged contemptuously.

"'Slife, man! D'ye insult me?"

"It—it's a hundred guineas," said Baldock, fearful lest the amount might tempt the buck from the lofty heights of his dignity.

Mr. Witherington was, of course, unmoved.

"I care not if it be a thousand," said he. "I am no earner of blood-money. That is your affair. I have him safe, but I cannot handle him alone. That is where I require your aid."

Baldock was on his feet at once in his eagerness.

"Where have you bestowed him?" he cried.

"Within a couple of miles from here, on the Portsmouth Road." And our gentleman rose in his turn, and took up his hat and cloak. "If you'll get to horse I'll lead you straight thither."

They rode out in the summer evening, and came in something under a half-hour to a cottage that stood a little back from the highway. Here they dismounted, and the thief-takers suffered themselves to be led round to the back through a little plot of neglected kitchen garden. As they approached, the welcoming neigh of a horse reached them from a wooden lean-to that stood against the cottage wall. Baldock stood still at the sound, then he stepped quickly to the door and threw it open. Then he caught his breath with a sudden hiss, and stood a moment, his men peering over his shoulder, all staring at a fine roan mare with a white blaze.

"'Tis the nag!" he cried. "'Tis the nag, sure enough!"

"And now for the man himself," said our gentleman, stepping aside to open the door of the cottage. They slammed the door of the lean-to upon the horse, and made haste to follow him.

In his wake they entered a dark, meanly furnished chamber. Their guide picked his way across the uneven floor, stooped in one of the corners, and dragged something heavy thence across to the light. There the thief-takers beheld a man in a scarlet riding-coat, with tarnished lace and a red wig that was awry now on his cropped head. He was bound neck and heel, as had been promised them; his face was livid, and he was breathing heavily, otherwise he showed no sign of life.

Baldock stooped over him and scanned him in the half-light.

"He answers the description," was his first comment. Then he stood up. "Thew!" he ejaculated. "The fellow's drunk, Mr. Witherington."

"I should not have hazarded single-handed to have taken him sober," was the smiling answer; and Baldock was duly impressed by Mr. Witherington's cunning.

¶

THEY set out with their prize flung like a sack across the back of the roan mare. They went afoot, leading their horses, and in this fashion they came to the outskirts of Petersfield as the long, summer twilight was deepening into night. But for Mr. Witherington's advice they would have gone thus straight into the town. Upon his suggestion, however, they stopped at the Trojan Horse to enquire if they might hire there a chaise. They succeeded, and into the vehicle they packed their captive, whom they had been careful to screen from all inquisitive eyes; for it was well known that Captain Evans did not lack confederates, and they had no wish to engage any who might seek to attempt a rescue.

Meanwhile, our gentleman had entered the house and called for a pint of claret. He was quietly sipping it, when Baldock flung into his presence, flushed and impatient to be gone.

" Mr. Witherington, sir," he said in a tone of remonstrance, " we're ready to start."

" A plague on haste, man. I never gulp good wine. Sit ye down and stay for me. The thing is done. We'll journey at our leisure."

" Sir," quoth Baldock, " you may journey at your leisure and your pleasure, but I'm upon the King's business. Either you come with us now, or you follow in your own good time."

Our gentleman sighed.

" I'll follow you, then," said he. " 'Tis odds I'll come up with you ere you've gone far."

Baldock flung out at once, and a moment later the crunch of departing wheels was heard.

Our gentleman sipped his claret leisurely and thoughtfully, smiling quietly, like a man well pleased with what was done. He was in no haste to depart. When his claret was finished he ordered another pint, so that it is little wonder that Baldock clattered through Fareham and pulled up at the sheriff's door without having been overtaken.

They bore the still unconscious tobyman into the hall, and propped him on a settle, whilst an excited servant carried the tidings to Sir Thomas.

Down the broad staircase, in a bedgown, his head swathed in a 'kerchief, his jovial countenance a-gleam with satisfaction, came Sir Thomas.

" Well done, Baldock, well done ! " he greeted the man from Bow Street. " Where did ye take the rogue ? "

Baldock scratched his wig and grinned to dissemble a lingering mortification.

" Faith, sir, we were forestalled by your friend Mr. Witherington. 'Twas he took him."

And Baldock related to the astounded sheriff the tale of how his assistance had been sought.

" Gad ! " cried Sir Thomas. " 'Tis incredible ! How was it done ? "

" Ay, incredible it was to me till he showed me your honour's watch, which he had recovered from the captain when he took him. As to how it was done, Mr. Witherington'll be here himself presently to tell you. He's following us. And he's behaved generous. He leaves the reward to us."

The joviality faded out of Sir Thomas's face. He stared blankly at Baldock. This had not been at all in his reckoning. Either Witherington took Evans or Baldock took him, and in either case he counted upon being fifty guineas in pocket. But now it seemed he would have to pay Witherington his wager and Baldock the reward.

He glowered across at the limp figure of the captive, huddled upon the settle with his red wig lying half across his face.

" What ails him ? " he asked.

" He's drunk," said Baldock. " Mr. Witherington made him drunk first."

" Ah ! " said the sheriff.

It was a grunt of contempt, anger, and other things. He strode across the hall, and shook the unconscious highwayman, but without result.

Sir Thomas stooped and sniffed the man's breath. An acrid, pungent odour arrested his attention. He swung round.

" 'Slife ! " he said, " the fellow's not drunk, he's drugged."

He shook him again more vigorously. As he released his hold the man collapsed sideways upon the settle, and the wig that had masked his features fell off and lay upside down on the floor, looking like a bird's nest.

The sheriff stepped back with a sharp exclamation, peered more closely, uttered an oath, and then stood staring for a long moment. Finally he broke into a long, contemptuous laugh.

" Rat me ! Baldock, you fool, ye've been bubbled ! "

" Bu-bubbled ! " stammered Baldock. " What can your honour mean ? By whom have I been bubbled ? "

" By Captain Evans, of course. The man that sought you out at Liphook was Evans himself. Small wonder he was able to show you the watch he stole from me."

In utter silence Baldock and his followers gaped awhile at the sheriff. At last :

" Then who the plague is this ? " quoth Baldock, flinging out an arm to indicate his unconscious captive.

" This, you fool," said the sheriff, " is Mr. Witherington."

# Happiness

*"'Tis nowhere to be found, or everywhere"*

## By GUY DE MAUPASSANT

IT was tea-time, just before the lights were brought in. The sky was all rosy with sunset and shimmering with gold dust. The villa looked down upon the Mediterranean, which lay without ripple or quiver, like a vast sheet of burnished metal, smooth and shining in the fading daylight. The irregular outline of the distant mountains on the right stood out black against the pale purple background of the western sky.

The conversation turned on love, that old familiar topic, and remarks that had been made many times before were being offered once again. The gentle melancholy of the twilight diffused a languorous charm and created an atmosphere of tender emotion. The word "love," constantly reiterated, now in a man's virile voice, now in a woman's delicate tones, seemed to dominate the little drawing-room, hovering like a bird, brooding like a spirit.

"Is it possible to remain faithful to one love year after year?"

Some said yes, some said no. Distinctions were made, limits defined, and instances cited. The minds of all, men and women alike, were surging with a host of disturbing memories, which trembled on their lips, but which they dared not utter. Their emotion expressed itself in the deep and ardent interest, with which they discussed this commonplace, yet sovereign, passion, this tender and mysterious bond between two beings.

Suddenly someone, with his eyes on the distant prospect, exclaimed:

"O look over there. What can it be?"

On the skyline, a great blurred mass of grey was rising out of the sea. The ladies sprang to their feet and gazed in surprise at this startling thing that they had never seen before.

"It is Corsica," someone explained. "It is visible two or three times a year in certain exceptional atmospheric conditions. When the air is perfectly clear the mists of water vapour, which usually veil the horizon, are lifted."

The ridges of the mountains could be faintly discerned and some thought that they could make out even the snow on the peaks.

This sudden apparition of a phantom world, emerging from the sea, produced on those who witnessed it a disquieting impression, a feeling of uneasiness, almost of consternation.

An old gentleman, hitherto silent, exclaimed:

"That very island which has risen from the waters as if in response to our conversation reminds me of a curious experience. It was there that I came upon a wonderful instance of faithful love, a love that was incredibly happy. This is the story:

"Five years ago I paid a visit to Corsica. Although visible now and then, like to-day, from the coast of France, less is known of that wild island than of America, and it seems almost more remote. Picture to yourselves a world still in a state of chaos, a raging sea of mountains, intersected by narrow gorges with rushing torrents. Instead of plains, there are vast, rolling sweeps of granite and gigantic undulations of the earth, overgrown with bush and great forests of chestnut trees and pines. It is a virgin country, desolate, uncultivated, in spite of an occasional village planted like a heap of rocks on a mountain top. There is no agriculture, industry, or art. You never come upon a scrap of wood-carving or sculpture, or any relic, showing in the Corsicans of old a taste, whether primitive or cultured, for graceful and beautiful things. It is this that strikes you most forcibly in that superb but austere country, its hereditary indifference to that striving after exquisite forms, which we call Art. In Italy, every palace is not only full of masterpieces, but is itself a masterpiece; in Italy, marble, wood, bronze, iron, metals,

stones, all testify to the genius of man; and even the humblest relics of antiquity, that lie about in old houses, reveal this divine passion for beauty. Italy is to all of us a beloved and sacred land, because it displays convincingly the energy, grandeur, power and triumph of creative intelligence.

"And opposite her shores, lies wild Corsica, just as she was in her earliest days. There a man leads his own life in his rude cottage, indifferent to everything that does not directly concern himself or his family quarrels. And he still retains the defects and qualities of primitive races. Passionate, vindictive, frankly bloodthirsty, he is at the same time hospitable, generous, faithful, ingenuous. He opens his door to the stranger and repays the most trifling act of kindness with loyal friendship.

"For a whole month I had been wandering all over this magnificent island, and I had a feeling of having reached the end of the world. There were no inns, no taverns, no roads. Mule tracks lead up to hamlets that cling to the mountain sides and look down upon winding cañons, from whose depths rises of an evening the deep, muffled roar of torrents. The wanderer knocks at the door of a house and asks for a night's hospitality. He takes his place at his host's frugal board, sleeps beneath his humble roof, and the next day the master of the house escorts his guest to the outskirts of the village, where they shake hands and part.

"One evening, after a ten hours' tramp, I reached a little solitary dwelling at the upper end of a valley, which, a mile lower, fell away abruptly to the sea. It was a ravine of intense dreariness, walled in by bleak mountains, rising steeply on either side, and covered with bush, fallen rocks and lofty trees. Near the hut there were some vines and a small garden, and at a little distance some tall chestnut trees. It was enough to support life, and indeed amounted to a fortune on that poverty-stricken island.

"I was met by an old woman of severe aspect and unusual cleanliness. Her husband rose from a straw-bottomed chair, bowed to me, and then resumed his seat without a word.

"'Pray excuse him,' said his wife. 'He is deaf. He is eighty-two.'

"To my surprise, she spoke French like a Frenchwoman.

"'You are not a native of Corsica?' I asked.

"'No, we are from the mainland, but we have lived here for fifty years.'

"A wave of horror and dismay swept over me at the thought of those fifty years spent in that gloomy cranny, so far from towns and places where men live. An old shepherd entered, and we all sat down to supper, which consisted of a single course, thick broth containing potatoes, bacon and cabbages all cooked together. When the short meal was over I took a seat before the door. I was weighed down by the melancholy aspect of that forbidding landscape and by that feeling of depression which at times overtakes the traveller on a dismal evening in dreary surroundings, a foreboding that the end of everything, the end of existence, the end of the world, is at hand. Suddenly the appalling wretchedness of life is borne in upon us; the isolation of each one of us; the hollowness of everything; the black loneliness of the heart, which is lulled and deceived by its own imaginings to the brink of the grave.

"Presently the old woman rejoined me, and with the curiosity which lingers even in the serenest soul she began to question me.

"'So you come from France?'

"'Yes, I am on a pleasure trip.'

"'I suppose you live in Paris.'

"'No, my home is Nancy.'

"At this she seemed to be seized by some violent emotion, and yet I cannot explain how it was that I saw, or rather felt, her agitation.

"'Your home is Nancy?' she repeated slowly.

"Her husband appeared in the doorway, with the impassive air that deaf people have.

"'Never mind about him,' she continued, 'he cannot hear us.' After a pause she resumed:

"'Then you know people at Nancy?'

"'Yes, nearly everyone.'

"'Do you know the Sainte-Allaizes?'

"'Very well indeed. They were friends of my father's.'

"'What is your name?'

"I told her. She looked at me searchingly. Then, in the low voice of one conjuring up the past:

"'Yes, yes, I remember perfectly. And what has become of the Brisemares?'

"'They are all dead.'

"'Ah! And did you know the Sirmonts?'

"'Yes, the last of them is a General now.'

"She was quivering with excitement, with pain, with mingled emotions, strong, sacred, impossible to describe, with a strange yearning to break the silence, to utter all the secrets, hitherto locked away in her heart, to speak about those people, whose very names shook her to the soul.

"'Henri de Sirmont. Yes, I know,' she exclaimed. 'He is my brother.'

"I glanced at her in amazement. Suddenly I remembered.

"Long ago there had been a terrible scandal among the Lorraine aristocracy. Suzanne de Sirmont, a beautiful and wealthy girl, had eloped with a non-commissioned officer in the Hussar regiment commanded by her father. The son of a peasant, but for all that a fine figure in his blue pelisse, this common soldier had captivated his Colonel's daughter. No doubt she had had opportunities of seeing him, admiring him, and falling in love with him, as she watched the squadrons trooping past. But how had she contrived to speak to him? How had they managed to meet and come to an understanding? How had she ventured to convey to him that she loved him? No one ever knew.

"No suspicion had been aroused. At the end of the soldier's term of service they disappeared together one night. A search was made for them, but without result. Nothing was ever heard of them again and the family looked upon her as dead.

"And now I had found her in this desolate valley.

"'I remember perfectly,' I said at last. 'You are Mademoiselle Suzanne.'

"She nodded. Tears welled from her eyes. Then with a glance towards the old man, who was standing motionless on the threshold of his hut:

"'And that is my husband.'

"Then I realised that she still loved him, that she still beheld him with eyes that had not lost their illusion.

"'I trust that you have been happy?' I ventured.

"In a voice straight from the heart she answered:

"'Yes, very happy. He has made me very happy. I have never regretted anything.'

"I gazed at her in sympathetic surprise, marvelling at the power of love. This well-bred, wealthy girl had followed that humble peasant, and had stooped to his level. She had submitted to an existence destitute of all the graces, luxuries, and refinements of life. She had conformed to his simple ways. And she still loved him. She had become a peasant woman, in bonnet and cotton gown. She sat on a straw-bottomed chair at a wooden table, and supped on a broth of cabbages, potatoes and bacon, served in an earthenware dish. At night she lay on a palliasse by his side. She had never had a thought for anything but her lover. And she regretted nothing neither jewels, silks and satins, luxuries cushioned chairs, the warmth and perfume of tapestried rooms, nor downy couches so grateful to weary limbs. He was her one desire. As long as he was there she asked no more of life.

"A mere girl, she had sacrificed her whole future, the world, and those who had brought her up and loved her. All alone with him, she had come to this wild ravine. And he had been all in all to her. He had satisfied her heart's desires, its dreams, its endless longings, its undying hopes. He had filled her whole life with bliss from beginning to end. She could not possibly have been happier.

"I lay awake all night, listening to the old soldier's stertorous breathing, as he slept on his pallet by the side of her who had followed him to the ends of the earth, and I pondered on their strange, yet simple story; their happiness, so perfect, yet founded on so little.

"At sunrise I shook hands with the old couple and bade them farewell."

The speaker was silent.

"You may say what you please," one of the women exclaimed, "her ideals were paltry. Her wants and desires were absurdly primitive. She was just a fool."

"What did that matter?" replied another woman pensively. "She was happy."

On the horizon, Corsica was vanishing in the gloom of night, sinking slowly back into the sea, as if its vast shadowy form had manifested itself for no other purpose than to tell its tale of those two simple lovers who had found a refuge on its shores

# Burdon's Tomb

*"There are worse things waiting for men than death"*

By BARRY PAIN

MRS. LANGLEY and her companion, Miss Gilderay, both thought rather well of Mr. Agravine. It was their first visit to Egypt, and Mr. Agravine's greater experience had been of use to them. He was quiet and without presumption, an elderly man with tired and rather magnetic eyes. "He has a story, of course," said Miss Gilderay.

"We all have," said Mrs. Langley; "and we never tell them."

Miss Gilderay blushed. She was plain, kindly, sincere, and thirty-five. Mrs. Langley was five years older and looked five years younger. She was not beautiful, but everybody said she had nice eyes and a pretty figure.

"I am glad he is coming on the *Rameses*," said Mrs. Langley. "He is useful. He has done it all before, and he knows more than the dragomans. Of course, Mr. Castle is useful, too. A frightful nuisance, though."

"Oh, frightful!" Miss Gilderay assented. "Still, one feels sorry for him."

In the lounge of the hotel after dinner that night Mr. Agravine spoke to them about Sir Felix Burdon's tomb. The tomb was thus spoken of by careless people in Cairo and Luxor, but Sir Felix had merely been its excavator, and the work of excavation was not yet quite complete. It was the tomb of a high priest who had died in Thebes twelve hundred years before Christ was born. It was of considerable size and importance, and its mural paintings were interesting and well-preserved. Mr. Agravine wished particularly to see this tomb, and said he should try if anything could be arranged through the dragoman on the boat. He was describing some interesting points about this tomb when young Mr. Castle came up and joined the group. He was always doing that, and sometimes he was a nuisance. He was a young man of twenty-eight, travelling by himself and paying a good deal for excess luggage. He was possessed of many and elaborate clothes. Chance propinquity at the hotel dinner had introduced Mr. Agravine, and Mr. Agravine had in turn presented Mr. Castle. This had been at Mr. Castle's request, for he had very nearly decided to fall in love with Mrs. Langley. She was just enough interested in him to flirt with him, and only just. To-night she sent him away at once. "Go and find out the name of that very beautiful girl with the red hair."

The girl with red hair was travelling with two elderly ladies, who were set in a totally different key from her. The old ladies were Victorian. The girl looked as if she had walked straight out of a German fairy tale.

Mr. Castle did not know his way about at all. At the end of the evening he had not got the required information. He came back to Mrs. Langley, and, though she laughed, she sent him away again. She was definitely not going to speak to him any more until he could tell her what she wanted to know.

Chance gave it to him next morning. He happened to see the girl come out of her room, and he noted the number. He had only to look now at the numbers in the hall and see what name was attached. He went to Mrs. Langley in triumph. "I've got it," he said. "She is Miss Averil."

"Who is?"

"The red-haired girl that you wanted to know about. She is travelling with two sisters—Miss Bryans. They are probably her aunts."

"I don't think I care," said Mrs. Langley. "It was really her first name that I wanted to know."

The subject turned up again on the first day of their departure from Cairo on the *Rameses*. Miss Averil and her two aunts happened also to be going on to Assouan on the *Rameses*, and Mrs. Langley, in a comparatively short space of time, had taught Miss Bryan an entirely new patience. As she walked the deck that evening after

dinner with Mr. Castle by her side she said: "What an idiot you are, if you do not mind my saying so. You never found out that girl's name at all. I give two minutes to it, and find out everything myself."

"And what is her first name?" asked Mr. Castle, patiently.

"Well, you ought to know. You ought to be able to deduce it from looking at her."

"Yseult?" suggested the young man.

"Oh, goodness, no! Her name is Zoe. Don't you think that's right?"

"No," said Mr. Castle. "Zoe is a maid of Athens, very nearly black as the ace of spades."

"Rubbish! Anyhow, Zoe Averil is not a maid of Athens. She is a maid of Oxford. And what Oxford has done to deserve it, I don't know. Her aunts are highly cultivated and belong to a Browning society. Now, why don't you find out interesting things and tell them to me? You never seem to know anything."

She sent him to fetch French coffee for her, and when he brought it decided that she would take Turkish coffee that night. Really, she did not treat him very well. Her manner with Mr. Agravine was quite different.

On the day that they arrived at Luxor Mr. Agravine told them that there was quite a chance that they would be able to see Burdon's tomb. The dragoman of the boat had been Sir Felix Burdon's dragoman during his first season in Egypt. He had assisted him since in some trouble that Sir Felix had had with his labourers. It was quite possible that he would be able to arrange it.

The dragoman did arrange it. Chance favoured him. Sir Felix was waiting for some heavy timbers, and meanwhile the work of excavation had ceased. He cursed the dragoman sincerely. He said most insulting and improbable things about the dragoman's ancestry. He told him that if he ever suggested such a thing again he would break his head with a stick; but none the less he permitted him to bring up his gang from the *Rameses* on the following day. They were not, of course, to enter the two chambers of the tomb which Sir Felix used as his living-room and stores.

The party from the *Rameses*, about thirty in number, crossed the river from Luxor and rode five miles. They halted and dismounted at the top of the long slope which led down to the tomb.

Led by the dragoman, the procession of tourists passed down the sandy slope into the darkness, under a crest piled with great rocks. Then came the burning of magnesium wire and the dragoman's lecture—a little sketchy, because he did not know the tomb—on the paintings and inscriptions. He was most impressive. "This tomb never been shown before, ladies and gentlemen. Specil permit. No other dragomans can show it."

He scooped up two inquiring Germans, who would have made a dash for that part of the tomb which they had been particularly requested not to enter, and shepherded his party out into the open again—all but five of them.

Just as these five were leaving, they found themselves confronted by a man in grey flannel trousers and an old Norfolk jacket of brown canvas. He reminded Mrs. Langley at once of Don Quixote. He began to speak to them about what they had seen, and he spoke with evident knowledge and authority.

Miss Gilderay whispered a word to Mrs. Langley, and Mrs. Langley said: "I suppose so," and turned to the stranger:

"You are Sir Felix Burdon, are you not?"

"Yes, that's my name."

"I asked you because we wanted so much to thank you for letting us come in here. It's too interesting for words. I hope we haven't been interrupting your work?"

"Not at all," said Sir Felix. "We don't start digging again till to-morrow. I was just waiting for some stuff to come up from Luxor. I shall be living here for the next two months, you know."

"Living here?" said Miss Gilderay. "Actually in this tomb?"

"Why not? In here or in a tent just outside. I make myself very comfortable, and it saves the bother of going backwards and forwards."

"It seems wonderful. I supposed that you lived on the *Lotus*. We saw it just above Luxor."

"Last year I used the dahabeeyah a good deal, and I am meaning to dine and sleep there to-night; but the *Lotus* leaves to-morrow for Assouan, taking some friends of mine who are to go on to the Second Cataract."

As he spoke he glanced over the party. Mr. Castle carried Mrs. Langley's camera and fly-whisk. Mrs. Langley looked charming and Miss Gilderay earnest, and

a pretty girl with red hair was talking to Mr. Agravine on one side.

"I tell you what," said Sir Felix, cheerfully; "there's a very interesting bit of painting in that second chamber on the left there, and I think your dragoman missed it. I should really like to show you that. I will get candles."

"It's very, very kind of you," said Mrs. Langley. "But won't they be waiting for us?"

"Oh, I hope so. Your dragoman knows that you are speaking with me, and therefore he must wait. We shan't keep them five minutes."

He dived away into the darkness as he spoke, and returned with a box of candles.

As they were lighting their candles it chanced that he heard Mr. Agravine's name mentioned.

"I wonder," said Sir Felix, "are you Mr. Agravine, the collector, the great authority on Corot?"

"A great authority on nothing, I'm afraid. But I've been a collector of pictures all my life, to my sorrow."

"But why to your sorrow?"

"A long story, and I should be ashamed to tell it."

"When we get back to the boat," said Miss Gilderay, as she lighted her candle, "the rest will be very jealous of us."

"What on earth for?" asked Sir Felix, laughing.

"Because we have special privileges. The others have only had a dragoman; we get the real explorer."

"Can't understand jealousy," said Sir Felix, "even if it's anything of importance."

"Why not?" Mrs. Langley asked.

Sir Felix shrugged his shoulders.

"To the ancient Egyptian," he said, "death was the only important thing that happened to him in his life. Once one gets that point of view one ceases to be jealous."

"But it's rather amazing that you should have that point of view," said Miss Gilderay.

"Oh, well, explanations are long and tiresome things. Now, then, here is the thing I wanted to show you. Hold your candles up very high, please. That's right. It's really an astonishingly modern idea, considering the date at which it was painted. You see that figure——"

He never finished that sentence. The floor of the chamber seemed to sway upwards. They staggered against one another. Miss Gilderay caught a sliding surface of wall and fell to the ground grotesquely. There was a sharp hissing sound, followed by a roar like a cannonade, that drowned their exclamations. Then came a heavy thud-thud, as of some titanic hammer beating down soft earth. And then all was still. Sir Felix alone still held his lighted candle in his hand. The other candles had fallen and gone out.

Sir Felix helped Miss Gilderay to her feet again, and assured himself that nobody was hurt. They found and re-lit their candles.

"But what on earth was it? What terrible thing has happened?" cried Miss Gilderay.

"It appeared to me," said Mr. Agravine, "like a shock of earthquake. It was as if a mountain had come down on top of us."

"That is probably what has happened. If you don't mind waiting a moment, I'll go and see what I can find out. I'll be back as soon as I can."

¶

IT seemed a long time before he returned. They spoke together in awed tones, speculating on the chances. When Sir Felix came back to them, he saw white, grave faces, but no sign of panic. He hesitated. He had practically to pronounce a death-sentence on these five people and on himself. And then Mrs. Langley spoke.

"You have bad news, I see," said Mrs. Langley. "But we have expected it. The entrance to the tomb is blocked?"

"That is so," said Sir Felix. "It is bad for me, because I brought you back here. The rest of the party are safe outside. However, we must see if we can work a way out. I have a pick and a couple of shovels here."

"Can't we do anything, too?" asked Miss Gilderay.

"Nothing at the moment, I think. Make yourselves as comfortable as you can there."

He pointed to the chamber which had been furnished as his own living-room.

The men returned to the entrance-hall, stripped to the waist, and began their labour. It was absolutely ineffective, and Sir Felix had known from the first that it would be ineffective. But everything had to be tried. The sand and rubble fell in on them, and they could make no way. At last they gave it up.

" Will you call the ladies who were with you ? " said Sir Felix. " They had better know."

## II

DECK-CHAIRS had been found for the three women. Agravine and Castle sat on the ground, their backs to the wall. Sir Felix remained standing. There were plenty of candles, and the hall was brightly lit.

" Tell us now," said Mrs. Langley, " what the chances are."

" We will look at the best side first," said Sir Felix. " We are five miles from Luxor, and Luxor is on the rail. The tools and the men needed for an attempt at rescue ought to be available and to be here within a very few hours. You're with Thomas Cook & Son, and they won't lose anybody if they can help it, and they are pretty potent people in Egypt. The natives will probably be scared, and may be reluctant to come to work here. But baksheesh and the hide-whip are good arguments. I think we will take it for granted that everything that can be done to save us will most certainly be done."

" I see," said Zoe Averil, " that you think it will be of no use."

" I do, but I may be wrong. I am guided by the sounds we heard and by my knowledge of the conformation of the ground round here. I believe that we're buried too deep for them to reach us in less than a week's work. You must remember that they will probably find it difficult at first even to determine the point at which they shall dig. I've been talking it over with Mr. Agravine, and we don't think that the air here will last more than three or four days. So now you see what I've done."

" You must not say that again," said Mrs. Langley. " Nobody here would be mad enough to hold you in any way responsible. Besides, we've talked it over—Miss Gilderay, Zoe Averil and myself—and we also had come to the conclusion that there was very little hope. As it happens, we three, more, perhaps, than most women, can take this quietly and wait for death without making any fuss."

" Yes," said Zoe. " I see you're looking at me, and I know I've been crying. But that was because of my people, and not for myself at all. So far as I myself am concerned—I'll tell you a secret—I'm glad."

" How horrible ! " said Agravine.

And they began to discuss together the best arrangements that could be made for the three days left to them. On one point they were unanimous. Those days were to be made as easy as possible. The candles that lit them, and the flame of the spirit stove, would burn up air. But the tomb was to remain lit, and they would eat and drink, though to-morrow they would die. And when there were signs that the last moments were approaching they would not prolong the period of headache and malaise and nausea. Sir Felix had a charcoal stove, which he used for cooking on in the open. If this were lit all would soon be over.

There was not the slightest fear of any suffering from hunger or thirst. The chamber which Sir Felix used for his store-room had already been filled for the season, and even a modified luxury would be possible. The women claimed for themselves the slight household work that there would be to do. Sir Felix used paper plates and dishes that would not need to be washed, and when used could be thrown, with all other refuse, down the deep shaft at the further end of the tomb. At night the men would camp in the entrance-hall, or deck-chairs. The women would fare a little more easily, dividing such bedding as there was among them in the room at the other end of the tomb. The big tank had been filled, and there was bottled water for drinking besides. The only thing that seemed likely to distress them was the waiting, the actual waiting for three days before death came.

At present they did not feel this at all. The earthquake shock had thrown them into something approaching stupor. Now came the reaction. They were excited, and talked eagerly. There was much to be done. The floor of the big hall had to be sprinkled with water, that the dust might not bother them. A table and seats had to be improvised, and a meal prepared. Young Castle, under direction, opened tins. Miss Gilderay busied herself at the spirit stove. Mr. Agravine and Sir Felix were occupied with a little rough carpentry. There was much activity and good temper. There was even laughter at minor mishaps. It was an astounding and fantastic picnic in the very face of death.

Presently Mrs. Langley came up to Sir Felix.

" Zoe—Miss Averil—and I have found

among your stores a big package of native costumes—women's costumes. May we use them ? "

" Of course you may. But please ask permission for nothing again. All that is here is common property. It belongs to all of us. I was commissioned by a lady in England to get those dresses for her. And the commission bored me terribly. Now I feel grateful to that lady."

An hour later they all met at dinner. The materials of the repast had mostly come out of tins, but Miss Gilderay had been very clever. The champagne was excellent, though two of the men were compelled to drink from tea-cups. Mr. Castle's voice began to be heard rather frequently. There was a faintly triumphant note in it, and it was not entirely due to the champagne. The propinquity of Mrs. Langley affected him.

¶

AT the end of the repast Mr. Castle opened a gold cigarette-case and presented it to Mrs. Langley. She did not appear to see it, taking no notice of it. Selecting a cigarette himself, he took from his pocket a gold matchbox. All his waistcoat-pocket furniture was of pure gold, and silver was nothing accounted.

" Wait one moment, Mr. Castle," said Sir Felix. " What do you think about it, Agravine ? It isn't as if we could open the windows and make the whole thing fresh again to-morrow."

" By Jove ! I hadn't thought of that," said Castle, and returned the cigarette to his case.

" Well," said Agravine, " our principle was that we were to make it as easy for ourselves as possible. This hall is fairly lofty as compared with the smaller chambers. Suppose we permit each person one cigarette after dinner to-night, and then see what it is like to-morrow morning ? I imagine we shan't notice it, but, if we do, we can set one of the smaller chambers of the tomb apart as a smoking-room, hanging something over the entrance."

" Good ! " said Sir Felix. " I think you are right." He produced his own cigarette-case, and Mrs. Langley and Miss Gilderay both took cigarettes from it. Zoe Averil did not smoke.

There was a little buzz of conversation, and then a sudden silence. And into the silence broke the clear, silvery voice of Zoe Averil.

" I want to ask you something, Sir Felix. You look rather anxious, and I don't understand anxiety when the end is so certain. What is it you are afraid of for us ? "

" I'll tell you frankly. I'm afraid of reaction. I have got no words to say how splendid I think you three women have been. You all seem without fear. But we have many hours before us yet. There will be little or nothing to do. Here we shall be in prison together, glaring at one another. If our cheerfulness broke down, if we ceased to be good-tempered, if we got to long for the end—well, it's possible."

" Tell us your story, Sir Felix," said Mrs. Langley.

" My story ? What do you mean ? "

" The story of yourself."

" I've never yet told it. I'd never meant to tell it at all. Yet, now that I come to think about it, I don't know that it wouldn't ease my mind to make a confession before I died. You will none of you think very well of me when you've heard it, and so I must make one condition : there is not to be one word of comment."

To this all agreed.

" I am at present thirty-eight years of age. When I was a boy of fourteen, early one summer morning I wrecked the whole of my life. It is in consequence of what I did, or failed to do, then that I succeeded to the baronetcy—if that is worth anything—and became a rich man, and have never since had one moment of complete happiness. What I've got to tell you is that I was a coward. Even now, in similar circumstances, I think I might be a coward again. There are people who have no fear. There are people who are brave enough for the ordinary things of life, but have one special fear which overmasters them. I believe there are many such, and I was one of them. With some men the overmastering horror is connected with fire. They live in dread of it. They never go to an hotel or a house for the first time without looking from their windows to find what they would do in case of fire. The thing haunts them. My case is different. I was supposed to be a particularly courageous and high-spirited boy, but I also was haunted—by a dread of drowning. I was afraid of the water. As a child, when I first saw the sea I screamed with terror. As I got older and went to school I had to get over this to some extent. I managed, with the greatest agony to myself and with the strictest concealment

of my real feelings, to learn to swim. In the summer holidays I bathed every morning with my elder brother in the river before breakfast. I used to pretend that I loved it. And yet every day it was all I could do to get myself to go in. There, can't you guess the rest of it? No, don't speak."

He took a sip of champagne, and continued his story.

On the morning in question Adrian, his elder brother, who was an expert swimmer, had remained long in the water after Felix had left it. Suddenly Adrian was attacked by cramp and cried for help.

"I was unable to move," said Sir Felix. "I stood there on the bank half-dressed, looking at him, and I was actually unable to move. I could not make myself do it. I pictured him dragging me down into the green water. I also began to call loudly for help. I told myself that when he was insensible, and it would be safe for me to tackle him, I would go in and rescue him, but it was not till I heard steps and became afraid of being found on the bank that I managed to fall into the water. I never reached my brother. Fear had taken all the power from my muscles. I could not swim at all. I went down at once. When we were taken out by the men who came in answer to my call, he was dead and I was insensible. I recovered, told a lying story, and let people praise my heroism. Can you wonder that the recollection of that morning has haunted me all my life? I, who hate cowardice and lies and selfish brutality, have to look upon myself as a coward, a liar, and a murderer. Since then I have done everything I could, short of actual suicide, to end it. In South Africa the Boer bullets and the enteric took better men and left me free. Here in Egypt I found a fascination. Here also lived people who all their lives through had looked forward to their death. Excavation, too, has its risks, or can be made to have them. I have shirked none of them. I have even invented them. And all the time I have had to put a good face on things before the world. I dared not let people know what I really was. I joined in sports, I laughed at jokes, I pretended to be interested in all manner of things. It is a relief unspeakable to me that from this moment, for the few hours that will elapse before I die, I need pretend no longer. I have shown myself as I am."

There was complete silence when he finished speaking. It had been agreed that there was to be no word of comment. Then openly, across the table, Mrs. Langley stretched out her hand to him, and he held it for a moment. Miss Gilderay, rising, with Zoe Averil close to her, began to clear away things. Mr. Agravine, helping them, sought and found an occasion to say something absolutely commonplace.

¶

SUDDENLY Mr. Castle brought his hand down on the table.

"Wait a minute," he said. "If you don't mind, I mean. If I don't do it now I never shall."

"What is it, Mr. Castle?" asked Mr. Agravine.

"My name's not Castle, but that's no matter. It's the only name you'll ever know me by. I've got a story to tell—a true story. The night's young, and in any case we shall be getting a long sleep soon."

"Don't get excited about it, Mr. Castle," said Mrs. Langley, quietly. "We are quite willing to hear you."

Those who had risen from their places sat down again, and the young man began.

"I suppose I ought to blame myself alone for what I am going to tell you, but I don't. I blame my father more than myself. He's a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields. I dare say you'd know the name if I gave it. I have been on bad terms with him all my life. All my life he has kept me short of liberty and short of money. He forced me to take, or pretend to take, his views in religion and politics and everything. It was only by hypocrisy that I could make life with him tolerable. He insisted upon it that I should follow his profession, although he knew that I hated it. I don't care now whether I'm laughed at or not, and I'll tell you what I wanted to be. I wanted to be an actor. He would not hear of that, of course. He'd given me a good education, public school and Oxford, and I was to go into his office. I hated it, but I did what I was told. I went through my articles, I passed all necessary examinations. I became admitted as a solicitor, and then, for years, I did the work of managing clerk for him for about half a managing clerk's salary. At twenty-seven I had very little more freedom than I had at seventeen. I was not allowed a latch-key. I had to give

an account of everything I did and almost everything I thought. It would have been just if I had been taken into partnership, but my father would not hear of that. I was to inherit the business when he died, and until then I might wait. So it went on. Month after month of formal and uninteresting routine. Month after month of snubs and checks. If ever a man hated his father, I hated mine. Well, he'd screwed down the safety-valve, and after that it was his own look-out. What happened was inevitable."

He paused a moment, irresolute.

"Go on," said Mrs. Langley.

"Oh, I'm not going to shirk it. One day last July my father handed me the firm's cheque for nine hundred pounds. I was to cash it and go on to the office of another solicitor to complete a purchase on behalf of a client. It was the kind of thing I had often done before. As you know, of course, payment is generally made in Bank of England notes. Until the moment when I had that cheque in my hands I had formed no plan at all. I had had a specially exasperating week with my old father, and was determined that something would have to be done. As I slipped that cheque into my pocket I decided what it should be. I got cash for the cheque, taking the greater part of it in small notes and twenty pounds in gold. I was very well known at the bank. If I had asked for the whole of it in gold I doubt if it would have aroused any suspicion. Then I got into a cab and drove round to one or two shops and bought a dressing-case and some other things. The change had begun already. My father did not permit me to take cabs when a bus would serve, or a bus when it was an easy walk, though he never went anywhere except in a cab himself. I knew that the last place in which they would look for me would be in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and so went to a small hotel in Holborn. For two or three days I lay low and watched the papers carefully morning and evening, expecting to find some account of my disappearance. There was never a word about it, and then I knew that I was quite safe. My father had not taken the view that I had been abducted by thieves, but that I myself was a thief. To save his name and the name of his firm he would be quite willing to pay nine hundred out of his own pocket. I laughed at the thought of that. It occurred to me, however, that he would probably have put private detectives on to me, and for some weeks I was careful, going out only at night in closed cabs. It was dull, because I knew nobody. I still watched the papers, and still found no allusion to myself. I had expected a veiled notice in the agony column of the *Times*, but there was nothing. The old man had evidently determined to cut me off altogether. At last, one night, more because I was sick of solitude than because I thought it was safe, I crossed over to Calais by the night boat. I remained in Paris for a few weeks, and then started off on a kind of walking tour. I made a good many acquaintances, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I never had the slightest qualm of conscience, and I am not sure that I have any now. I said to myself that I had not stolen the nine hundred pounds, I had merely drawn my back pay. I got plenty of amusement, and incidentally I improved my French. On my return to Paris I happened to be in Cook's office one day and heard a man inquiring about Egypt. It was now November. My walking tour had cost me very little, and I still had plenty of money left. That is how I came here. There is my story, and you can think what you like."

"Thank you for telling us," said Mrs. Langley. "It is better to make no other comment."

"I notice," said Mr. Castle, bitterly, "that you do not give me your hand."

"I do not," said Mrs. Langley.

"You can treat me as a leper if you like."

"Nor do I do that."

Miss Gilderay broke in hastily. "But what did you mean to do when the money was all gone?"

"I was willing to do anything, except to arise and go to my father. If I had found an opportunity I should have taken it. If I had found none I should probably have committed suicide. Burdon's tomb has spared me my pains."

And from that time onward Mr. Castle began to give trouble.

## III

THE night seemed interminable. Sir Felix Burdon, an old campaigner, slept well enough in his deck-chair, but all the others were restless. In the passage one candle burned. Its flame, absolutely motionless in the still and yellow air, was

like a piece of burnished metal. At the farther end of the tomb, in the chambers where the women slept, low voices could be heard at intervals all through the first hours of night.

At five in the morning all was still. Mr. Agravine, who had tried a thousand positions, had found one in which he was able to sleep. Castle, who had stretched himself at full length on the sandy floor, lay with his face on one arm, breathing heavily.

Suddenly Castle sprang to his feet.

"I want to get out of this!" he shouted wildly. "I'm not going to die like a rat in a trap. Let me out. I've got money to spend, I tell you. I must get out!"

Sir Felix Burdon, awakened by the noise, sprang to his feet. He was rather angry.

"Hold your row," he said. "D'you want to wake everybody? If you start that screaming again I'll gag you."

Castle collapsed. He sat on the floor, with his head in his hands, rocking to and fro. "Give me a drink and I'll keep quiet," he said. "If I can't get out, give me a drink."

"Oh, go and get what you want!" said Sir Felix, contemptuously.

Agravine, who had lighted his candle, watched the scene with grave and dispassionate eyes.

Castle went off to the stores. They could hear him moving about there. Presently he returned with a cup and a bottle of whisky. His exceedingly elaborate knife contained a corkscrew amongst other implements, and he drew the cork.

"Why don't you all join me?" he asked. "Best thing you can do."

The other men refused, as briefly as possible. Castle poured the whisky into the cup and began sipping it.

"This is doing me good," he said. "I was suffering from chill. That is what it was. Might happen to anybody. This is the finest thing on earth, taken medicinally."

Nobody paid any attention to him. For half an hour he went on sipping steadily, then he drove the cork into the bottle with one blow of his fist, and flung himself at full length on the sand again. A moment later he was snoring. Sir Felix and Agravine were both awake now. They glanced at him and their eyes met.

"Yes," said Agravine. "I'm afraid he's a skunk. He was all right in the hotel and all right on the boat. But this experience has tried him a little too high. What ought we to do?"

Sir Felix shrugged his shoulders. "I don't see that we can do anything. It's only a short time now, anyhow. I don't know if it's my fancy, but the air here seems to me to be worse and closer already. If he wants to die like a hog, he must. Of course, if he gets noisy, we shall have to take some measures, but as long as the stuff makes him sleep—well, he's best asleep."

And then for a while they dozed fitfully. At seven o'clock they could hear sounds of movement at the farther end of the tomb, and then Zoe Averil appeared at the entrance of the hall. She wore a long native robe of dark blue.

"We're making some tea," she said. "Shall I bring you some?"

"That would be very kind of you," said Sir Felix. "I hope you've slept."

"I slept very well indeed. I had a little room all by myself. But I think the other two did not sleep so well. Miss Gilderay looks very tired and worn out."

Miss Gilderay and Mrs. Langley brought in the tea, but waited only for a moment and then went back to their own quarters. Hot tea, a wash in cold water, and a change of clothing refreshed the two men. They sat up and talked in low voices, while Castle still lay and snored.

"An experience like this," said Agravine, "makes one realise what an absolutely fantastic and foolish thing property is. One begins to wonder why one ever attached any importance to it. As you know, I simply gave up my life to the acquisition of one form of property—beautiful things—pictures. How absolutely absurd! Nothing of it is any good to me now, and I cannot take it along with me. Here in this small, imprisoned society for a few hours we lose the sense of property altogether. I am wearing one of your shirts, Sir Felix. It doesn't seem to me to matter in the least whose shirt it is. I really hardly thanked you. Community of goods becomes quite easy when one knows that one will soon be dead. And," he added sardonically, "becomes still easier when one man in the society finds all the goods, and the rest simply do the communing."

Sir Felix laughed. He pointed with his foot to the prostrate Castle. "Shall we wake the beggar," he said, "and let him clean himself up a bit?"

"No," said Agravine. "The longer he

sleeps, the better his nerves will be when he wakes."

An hour later Castle awoke of his own accord. He certainly did seem very much better. He was ashamed of himself and apologetic.

"Afraid I rather kicked up a row last night. Sorry. I suppose my nerves gave way. I shall be all right now that I have had a sleep."

" Oh yes," said Sir Felix, kindly. " You'll be all right. You've missed some very good tea by your slumbers. I dare say they'll make some more for you."

" Thanks," said Castle. " I don't want to trouble them. I'll wait till they join us."

¶

MEANWHILE he proceeded with his toilet and accomplished the rather difficult task of cutting himself with a safety razor. Of his own accord he washed the cups which had been used, and took them and the whisky bottle back to the store-room. There he found Zoe Averil and Miss Gilderay, and remained talking with them for a little time. Presently the whole party gathered together again round the trestle-table in the entrance-hall of the tomb.

The table was laid just as neatly and carefully as if it had really mattered. The women had seen to that. Zoe Averil still wore the native robe, the other two were in their ordinary clothes.

Castle was quite good-humoured at lunch and very talkative; it was fairly obvious that he was drinking too much. Suddenly Miss Gilderay, who sat next to him, said in a low voice: " I used to do that, too."

" Do what ? "

" I'll tell you." She raised her voice and addressed the others. " I was just saying to Mr. Castle that I, too, have a confession which I might make. It does not seem to be fair that you, Sir Felix, and you, Mr. Castle, should tell the worst of yourselves, and that I should still let you believe the best of me."

" I don't want you to suppose," said Sir Felix, " that there's the slightest compulsion upon you to say even one word. You mustn't feel bound to disclose anything."

" Down here, so near the end, disclosure is really very easy. You see, it does not matter any more. I shall not pretend that I am almost without fault. The only thing that I am afraid of is that you will laugh at me, or want to laugh at me. I've got no illusions about myself. I know that I am not pretty and never have been pretty. I am elderly, and it must seem absurd for me to speak of romance and love."

" I feel sure," said Mr. Agravine, " that we shall not want to laugh at you. No one wants to laugh at anything which is quite genuine."

" Hear, hear," said Mr. Castle, rapping noisily on the table.

Miss Gilderay moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue, looked at them unflinchingly, and began to speak.

" My father was the vicar of a London church which was in its way rather celebrated. The music was very good. The ritual was very ornate, and the sermons were very short. My father was a good musician and a very fair man of the world. He understood business thoroughly, and the greater part of his income was derived from careful speculations. There was a stockbroker in his congregation, an old man called Baldwin, who thought very highly of my father—as, indeed, most people did—and he used to advise him. My father was very careful that the world in general should know nothing of these business transactions, but to me he always defended them. He said that there were many calls upon his charity, and that one could only give in proportion to one's income. If he made money in Steel Commons, then he had the more to give away. He reminded me that some of the apostles themselves got their living as fishermen. It did not seem to me the same thing at all, but I did not criticise him. I was too fond of him to be critical.

" I used to help my father a good deal, doing all his secretarial work for him. I would type his sermon and his instructions to his broker all in the same morning.

" The choir of the church was for the most part paid, and paid by my father out of his own pocket. He said it was almost impossible to get good music except from professionals. But one day he came to me in a state of delight. He had found a new and admirable singer, a tenor, who was willing to give his services for nothing. ' He's a gentleman,' said my father, and paused—' or almost,' he added. I laughed, and told him that I knew that kind.

" When I saw the new tenor—Henderson, his name was—I still felt that I knew that

kind. He had good looks of rather a common description. His eyes were too small, his face too fat. He was slightly under the average height, I should say. I was quite prepared to take no interest in him whatever.

"And then I heard him sing, and forgot the man in the voice. He had a real tenor, and his singing was perfectly true. Somehow it was impossible to hear it without believing that behind that voice there was a beautiful and noble temperament. As a matter of fact, I know now that this is one of the commonest illusions. Music has its special beauty, which is isolated. It does not imply any other beauty of any kind.

"But that was ten years ago. Every Sunday I heard that man sing. I do not think now that I fell in love with the man, but I fell in love with the voice, and began to make inquiries about him, and found nothing very romantic. He was employed in an insurance office, and was doing very well. He was unmarried, and lived with his two sisters. One Sunday night he had been taking the solo part in the anthem, and I suppose that I was more than usually impressed. At any rate, when I got home I wrote a foolish letter and sent it to him.

"It was my belief that I had not committed myself in any way. I had given no address and given no signature. In case my handwriting should be recognised, I had typed the letter.

"Some weeks later my father thought he should take some notice of this Mr. Henderson, and told me to ask him to dinner. He came, and every minute I liked him less and less. In the drawing-room, afterwards, he got a chance to speak with me apart.

"'You do all your father's typing for him, don't you?' he said.

"I assented. I had typed lists and notices for the use of the choir, which, of course, he would have seen.

"'You ought to have a new letter "f" put on that machine,' he said. 'The top of it's got broken off. I notice these little things. I have noticed that "f" in everything that you have typed.'

"I did not lose my head. I said it was very likely, that the machine was always open, and that it was my belief that one of the housemaids used it to type her love-letters on. I said that I would have the 'f' key put right, but that I could not make out how on earth he came to have noticed it. This was as good as I could do, but it did not deceive him, and I saw that it had not deceived him. Before the evening was over I hated him far more than I had ever loved him.

"I spent a sleepless night in an agony of humiliation, and next day I was tortured with neuralgia. That was the beginning of it. To relieve the pain of the neuralgia, for the first time in my life I drank wine."

"Look here, Miss Gilderay," said Sir Felix, "we quite understand. You need not tell us the rest of it."

¶

MISS GILDERAY smiled mournfully. "I am not going to tell you the whole story. It is quite loathsome. I do not think I could do it. It is the story of endless effort and endless failure. The thing became public at last, and my father had to leave the parish. He died a few months afterwards, and I suppose his death saved me. At any rate, I have been able to do the most difficult thing of all. I am not what I once was, neither am I an abstainer. I drank a glass of wine at lunch just now. I shall drink another at dinner. But don't imagine that I am proud of my victory over myself. I could not be that, knowing as I do at what cost it was bought. Nor can it ever blot out of my mind the shame of so much previous defeat. I have spoken of it with a reason, though."

She looked full at Mr. Castle. "All right, all right," he said impatiently. "All these things have a physiological explanation."

"Yes," said Mr. Agravine. "And what explains the physiology?"

Mr. Castle glared and said nothing. Zoe Averil changed her place and now sat next to Miss Gilderay.

"It always seemed to me a pity," Mr. Agravine continued, "that any convention which is entirely false should be generally accepted. That is the case of the convention that divides people into saints and sinners. There are no saints, and in a sense there are no sinners. We are human beings, defective, but with some goodness. If we could only get that to be recognised, if that were the general opinion of society, society would be all the better for it."

"I've often thought," Sir Felix said, "that the case is very hard of a man who goes to prison once. What happens to him

when he comes out? By most people he is not forgiven, and in the other cases forgiveness is patronage. Both are as bad as can be. And yet I don't see what other line is to be taken. To treat crime solely as disease is more amiable than practical."

"I have no panacea," said Mr. Agravine. "I can't make a new heaven and a new earth. But in my time I have often wished I could make a new earth."

"The fact of the case is," said Mrs. Langley, "that one can't make any general rules at all. We can only deal with special cases as they arrive as intelligently and as humanely as possible."

"I see," said Mr. Castle, "that you take a very superior standpoint, Mrs. Langley. You pose as a righteous person, who is to do her best for people like—well, like Miss Gilderay and myself."

"I do not pose at all," said Mrs. Langley. "I was not thinking of how I should judge. but of how I should wish to be judged, If you want to know, I have already made my confession. Miss Gilderay has been a friend of mine for three years past. Last night I told her something that I had never told her or anybody else before. I am not going to tell you any more now, except that some time after my marriage I went through a week of madness. My punishment has been that I have had to be a coward, that I have had to join in the general combination against more than one woman, though I knew that they were little if at all more guilty than myself. You have made me face this shame before you men. Now are you content?"

"You know perfectly well that I had intended nothing of the kind."

He moved away from the table, and sat in the farthest corner of the hall with his back to the others. Presently he took a cigarette from his case and lit it.

"I say," said Sir Felix, "just put that down, will you, and stick your heel on it."

Mr. Castle scowled, but did as he was told. The others rose and began to clear away the things on the table.

The three women spent most of the afternoon in their own quarters. In the hall Mr. Agravine, with his pocket-knife in his hands, sat and carved a peach stone; he was astonishingly clever at work of that kind. Sir Felix wrote with the writing-block on his knee. If, as seemed likely, their bodies were ultimately dug out, he wished to leave behind him some instructions with reference to his property, and also with reference to the excavation work which he had in hand. Castle did nothing but sit in sulky silence.

At five o'clock Sir Felix looked at his watch. "Agravine," he said, "we've been shut up now for twenty-six hours. What d'you think of it?"

"I think another twenty-two hours will see the end of it. Before that time we shall have to light the charcoal stove and finish quickly. Have you got it ready?"

"Not yet. Come along to the store-room, and I'll show you how the thing works."

Castle followed the two men and stood watching them, his hands in his pockets. Once or twice he asked a brief question. The visit to the store-room gave him the opportunity to resume possession of the whisky bottle. Before dinner-time he had finished it. The other two men remonstrated with him, but he said gloomily that a man condemned to death had the right to eat and drink what he liked. He refused to join the others at dinner.

In truth dinner had become a farce. Confinement and oppressive air had destroyed the appetite of all of them. Even their conversation was at first quite without animation. But presently Miss Gilderay said:

"Do you know what Zoe Averil has been telling us this afternoon? She says that she hears somebody coming."

"Don't laugh at me," said Zoe Averil. "I'm quite sure."

Sir Felix looked across at Mr. Agravine. Were they all going mad, then?

"I don't see the possibility of it," said Sir Felix.

Suddenly, from his corner, Mr. Castle burst into a loud laugh. "What else did you expect?" he shouted. "It is the high priest come back to see the Christians who have defiled his tomb, and to watch their last agony."

"I think," said Mr. Agravine, "that you would do better to be quiet, Mr. Castle."

Castle growled that in future he would do what he liked.

"The question rather is," said Miss Gilderay, "if we want anybody to come—I mean, if we want to be rescued. I don't think I do particularly. Life does not hold very much for a plain unmarried woman of my age. and yet——"

"Yes," said Mrs. Langley, "and yet.

I know what you mean. Instinct is too strong for us. We thought we were sick of the world, but we would both go back to it if we could."

"I also," said Sir Felix.

"Not me," shouted Castle. "Not me. I would go back alone, but not with the rest of you. You all know too much. One would never be safe. At least, you think you know too much. That story I told you was make-up, to draw you all on. Idiots! Fools!"

¶

SIR FELIX stood up. "Get out of this, Mr. Castle. We cannot have you with us."

Castle did not move till Sir Felix was quite near him. Then he rose and lurched out of the hall and down the passage, flinging himself into one of the chambers at the side.

They went back to the point at which he had interrupted them. "Personally," said Mr. Agravine, "I think I should be contented either way. The effect of being buried alive for a few hours has been to show me that the whole of my life has been a mistake. I have been a collector, as you know. True, I have collected beautiful things. That makes no difference. Property has been my master. Property has made me do base and degrading things. Of one thing I am certain. If by any chance Miss Averil were right, and we were rescued, I would change my way of life. My pictures should go to the nation. I would be the slave of property no longer."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Mrs. Langley, "what you mean by that."

"I will tell you. It can hardly be called a confession. It is really too paltry for that. I was hypnotised, fascinated, by the collector's mania, and that drove me into stupidities."

"Still," said Mrs. Langley, "tell us. It will make the time pass."

"I suppose," said Mr. Agravine, "that it is not the love of beautiful things which degrades. I hope not, for I have always had that love. Degradation comes, not from love, but from possession, and that applies to more things than pictures. Until quite recently I was not a wealthy man. All that I could possibly spare was spent in the acquisition of what might be called stagnant capital. The possession of a thousand-pound picture costs a man forty pounds a year, whether he knows it or whether he does not. I was frequently hard pressed for money. I was frequently tortured by being compelled to relinquish some purchase on which I had set my heart.

"Such things do one no good. Again, I have not been a picture-dealer in the accepted sense of the word, but I have often sold one beautiful thing in order to acquire something which I thought more beautiful. I made the greatest profit that I possibly could. I brought commerce very near to a swindle. One instance particularly lingers in my memory. It was a thing which I did quite deliberately, and it now seems to me both cruel and absurd to have done it. A friend of mine told me that he knew an old Frenchman living at Eastbourne who wished to dispose of a picture. He knew nothing of its history, but believed it to be good. He wanted an expert opinion upon it, and I was an expert. To oblige my friend I went down to Eastbourne one Saturday to see this Frenchman—Janvier his name was. Janvier was a bachelor living in a small house, with just sufficient income of his own. In all matters of art I soon found that he was absolutely ignorant, but none the less, he had bought from time to time, bought pictures, some twenty of them. He brought out his great prize, the picture which he believed to be good, and I was able to tell him at once whereabouts in the National Gallery he would be able to find the original of which it was rather a poor copy. But among the twenty there was one other picture which I saw at once I should have to buy. I asked him about it. 'It was sold me,' he said—he spoke admirable English—'as being, in all probability, by Corot.'

"I laughed, and told him that a great many pictures were sold in that way, and that if Corot had lived to a hundred years and painted every minute of his time he could not have covered all the canvases that have since been assigned to him. All the same, that picture was a genuine and very fine Corot, and I knew it.

"'I gave ten pounds for it,' said Janvier, 'and I would not take less than twenty.'

"I told him that a hundred per cent. seemed rather a large profit to expect, but after a certain amount of grumbling I wrote him a cheque for twenty and took the picture back to town with me. It is one of the best things in my collection, and it is worth a very large sum, and I am heartily ashamed of it."

"But," said Miss Gilderay, "is there, after all, anything dishonest about it? If the people who are ignorant try to do business with the people who are expert, has not the expert got the right to profit by it?"

"It ought not to mean that he should buy a fine Corot for twenty pounds. Do you still hear someone coming, Miss Averil? For I assure you that if we are released Janvier shall have his picture back."

"Well," said Sir Felix, "we have all told our stories now except Miss Averil. And she is too young to have any story to tell."

"I have done good things and bad things, but nothing very good or very bad," said Zoe.

"And yet," said Sir Felix, "you said you were not sorry that this had happened, and that your life was to come to an end."

"That is true. But it is the future, and not the past, from which I was eager to escape. I will tell you just a little thing, a scrap of family history. My parents died when I was a child, and one of my earliest recollections is that I was rather proud of my hair, because an artist had admired it and had asked to paint me, and that my mother told me not to be proud of it, and that if I knew it would be a cause of grief to me. I did not know. She was speaking of a tradition which had been in our family for six generations. It was only a year ago that in some papers of my father's I came upon the story. From time to time during the last six generations a girl had been born in the Averil family with hair like mine, and in every case she had come to disaster. In most of the cases recorded she had died insane. During their lifetime my father and mother said nothing of this to me, and I believed that, if my father had not died so suddenly, he would have destroyed those papers, in order to spare me. Ever since I read them I have been haunted. For it is true that I am not quite normal. Every now and then, not at my own wish, and often to no serious purpose, I have had what Mrs. Langley calls that special sense. I have seen things that were happening far away. It's a pity, because I loved life."

"And if we are rescued?" said Mr. Agravine.

"What is to be is to be. If I had meant to take my life I should have done so a year ago. If I am rescued, I shall go back and meet whatever Fate has got for me. And I think we shall be rescued, for now I hear far more distinctly the sound of people coming. Listen! Can you not all hear it?"

For a moment all held their breath. There was a tense, deep silence. And then suddenly Mr. Agravine rose and put his ear to the wall.

"It is so," he said. "Come here, Burdon, and listen." Sir Felix listened for a moment.

"There can be no mistake about it. That is the sound of picks. There are many of them at work. In a few hours now they should get through to us."

"Wouldn't it be a good thing if I went and told Mr. Castle?" said Zoe Averil. "I think it was he who most wanted to get back to the world again."

"No," said Sir Felix. "Don't do that. I will go and tell him myself."

He went, and in a few moments returned. He said nothing until Miss Gilderay questioned him.

"Yes," he said, "I've told him."

"Hasn't that made any difference?" asked Mrs. Langley. "What did he say?"

"He says that the spirit of the high priest is in him, and that this is his tomb. Nothing else. Mad, of course. But he is perfectly quiet. He will probably recover when he gets out of this."

The women had a feeling that their rescuers should find them ready, and that everything should be in order. Helped by Sir Felix and Mr. Agravine, they cleared the table out of the hall altogether. In the chamber where he lay, they could hear Mr. Castle breathing heavily, as though asleep.

¶

ABOUT an hour later, as Sir Felix and Mr. Agravine sat listening to the sound of the picks, the women entered. Mrs. Langley was drawing on her gloves and carried her camera. Zoe had changed into her own clothes again. Miss Gilderay had rearranged her hair. They were all quite ready.

"This is good of you," said Sir Felix. "It will be much pleasanter if we five all wait together. There is only another hour or two now. Listen!"

They could hear the blows of the picks. They sat down, and for a time talked a

little, wondering who had organised the rescue and how it had been accomplished. And presently, because the air was very heavy and they had been short of sleep the night before, and a great strain had been taken off their minds, they became drowsy.

"I believe I'm going to sleep," said Miss Gilderay, leaning back in her deck-chair.

"I, too," said Sir Felix. "Why not? It will help to pass the time of waiting."

Soon they were so soundly asleep that they did not hear the stealthy footsteps from the adjoining chamber.

Silent and barefoot, carrying the glowing charcoal stove in his hands, Castle crept into the store-room. With deep breaths he drew in the poison. He turned to tear down the curtain that filled the entrance to the room, in order that the fumes might spread and all might die together. But before he could reach it he swayed and fell, and lay motionless.

And now the picks broke down into the entrance of the tomb. Through the opening streamed in a glorious sunlight that made the candle flames pale, and fresh, untainted air. And with these came fresh life and fresh courage to face it—for all, save the dead boy lying behind the curtain by the charcoal stove.

# *A Little Talk About Tea*

"SIR," said our learned friend, Dr. Bushwhacker, "we are indebted to China for the four principal blessings we enjoy. Tea came from China, the compass came from China, printing came from China, and gunpowder came from China—thank God! China, sir, is an old country, a very old country. There is one word, sir, we got from China that is oftener in the mouths of American people than any other word in the language. It is *cash*, sir, cash! That we derive from the Chinese. It is the name, sir, of the small brass coin they use, the coin with a square hole in the middle. And then look at our Franklin; he drew the lightning from the skies with his kite; but who invented the kite, sir? The long-tailed Chinaman, sir. Franklin had no invention; he never would have invented a kite or a printing-press. But he could use them, sir, to the best possible advantage, sir; he had no genius, sir, but he had remarkable talent and industry.

"Then, sir, we got our umbrella from China. The first man that carried an umbrella, in London, in Queen Anne's reign, was followed by a mob. That is only one hundred and fifty years ago. We get the art of making porcelain from China. Our ladies must thank the Celestials for their tea-pots.

"Queen Elizabeth never saw a tea-pot in her life. In 1664 the East India Company brought two pounds two ounces of tea as a present for his Majesty King Charles the Second. In 1667 they imported one hundred pounds of tea.

"Then, sir, rose the reign of scandal. Queen scandal, sir! Then, sir, rose the intolerable race of waspish spinsters who sting reputations and defame humanity over their dyspeptic cups. Then, sir, the astringent principle of the herb was communicated to the heart, and domestic troubles were brewed and fomented over the tea-table. Then, sir, the age of chivalry was over, and women grew acrid and bitter; then, sir, the first temperance society was founded, and high duties were laid upon wines, and in consequence they distilled whisky instead, which made matters a great deal better, of course; and all the abominations, all the difficulties of domestic life, all the curses of living in a country village; the intolerant canvassing of character, reputation, piety; the nasty, mean, prying spirit; the uncharitable, defamatory, gossiping, tale-bearing, whispering, unwomanly, unchristianlike behaviour of those who set themselves up for patterns over their vile decoctions, sir, arose with the introduction of tea. Yes, sir; when the wine-cup gave place to the tea-cup, then the devil, sir, reached his culminating point."

FREDERICK S. COZZENS.

# *Fashions Through The Ages*

## "The Thing" in 1363

FURS of ermine and lettice, and embellishments of pearls, excepting for a head-dress, were strictly forbidden to any but the royal family, and nobles possessing upwards of one thousand pounds per annum.

Cloths of gold and silver and habits embroidered with jewellery, lined with pure miniver and other expensive furs, were permitted only to knights and ladies whose incomes exceed four hundred marks yearly.

Knights whose income exceeded two hundred marks, or squires possessing two hundred pounds in lands or tenements, were permitted to wear cloth of silver, with ribands, girdles, &c., reasonably embellished with silver, and woollen cloth, of the value of six marks the whole piece, and were prohibited wearing silks and embroidered garments of any sort, or embellishing their apparel with any kinds of ornaments of gold, silk or jewellery. Rings, buckles, owches, girdles and ribands, were all forbidden decorations to them and the penalty annexed to the infringement of this statute was the forfeiture of the dress so made or worn.

J. R. Planche.

## Clothes and the Woman

LET women paint their eyes with tints of chastity, insert into their ears the word of God, tie the yoke of Christ around their necks, and adorn their whole person with the silk of sanctity and the damask of devotion; let them adopt that chaste and simple, that neat and elegant style of dress which so advantageously displays the charms of real beauty, instead of those preposterous fashions and fantastical draperies of dress which, while they conceal some few defects of person, expose so many defects of mind, and sacrifice to ostentatious finery all those mild, amiable, and modest virtues by which the female character is so pleasingly adorned.

Tertullian.

## Grecian Taste

EPIMEDEA, it appears, has not corrupted very grossly your purity and simplicity in dress. Yet, remembering your observation on armlets, I cannot but commend your kindness and sufferance in wearing her emeralds. Your opinion was formerly, that we should be careful not to sub-divide our persons. The arm is composed of three parts; no one of them is too long. Now the armlet intersects that portion of it which must be considered as the most beautiful. In my idea of the matter, the sandal alone is susceptible of gems, after the zone has received the richest. The zone is necessary to our vesture, and encompasses the person, in every quarter of the humanized world, in one invariable manner. The hair, too, is divided by nature in the middle of the head. There is a cousinship between the hair and the flowers; and from this relation the poets have called by the same name the leaves and it. They appear on the head as if they had been seeking one another. Our national dress, very different from the dresses of barbarous nations, is not the invention of the ignorant or the slave; but the sculptor, the painter, and the poet, have studied how best to adorn the most beautiful object of their fancies and contemplations. . . . We retain the only mark of barbarism which dishonours our national dress, the use of ear-rings. If our statues should all be broken by some convulsion of the earth, would it be believed by future ages that, in the country and age of Sophocles, the women tore holes in their ears to let rings into, as the more brutal of peasants do with the snouts of sows!

Walter Savage Landor.

## A Plea for Convention

TOUCHING indifferent things, as clothes and garments, whosoever will reduce them to their true end, which is the service and commodity of the body, whence dependeth their original grace and comeliness, for the most fantastical to my humour that may be imagined, amongst others I will give them our square caps; that long hood of plaited velvet, that hangs over our women's heads, with his parti-coloured trail. . . . These considerations do, nevertheless, never distract a man of understanding from following the common guise. Rather on the contrary we seemeth, that all several, strange and particular fashions proceed rather of folly, or ambitious affectation, than of true reason: and that a wise man ought inwardly to retire his mind from the common press and hold the same liberty and power to judge freely of all things, but for outward matters, he ought absolutely to follow the fashions and form customarily received.

MICHAEL DE MONTAIGNE.

SOMETIMES she applauds a pavement-sweeping train,
And presently dispraiseth it again;
Now she commends a shallow band so small,
That it may seem scarce any band at all;
But soon to a new fancy doth she reel,
And calls for one as big as a coach-wheel;
She'll wear a flowing coronet to-day,
The symbol of her beauty's sad decay;
To-morrow she a waving plume will try,
The emblem of all female levity:
Now in her hat, then in her hair is dressed;
Now, of all fashions, she thinks change the best:
Nor in her weeds alone is she so nice,
But rich perfumes she buys at any price;
Storax and spikenard she burns in her chamber,
And daubs herself with civet, musk and amber. ANON (1631).

## A Traveller's Comment

A FRENCH woman is a perfect architect in dress; she never, with Gothic ignorance, mixes the orders; she never tricks out a squabby Doric shape with Corinthian finery; or, to speak without metaphor she conforms to general fashion only when it happens not to be repugnant to private beauty.

The English ladies, on the contrary, seem to have no other standard of grace, but the run of the town. If fashion gives the word, every distinction of beauty, complexion, or stature ceases. Sweeping trains, Prussian bonnets, and trollopees, as like each other as if cut from the same piece, level all to one standard. The Mall, the gardens, and the playhouses are filled with ladies in uniform; and their whole appearance shows as little variety of taste as if the clothes were bespoke by the colonel of a marching regiment, or fancied by the artist who dresses the three battalions of guards.

But not only the ladies of every shape and complexion, but of every age too, are possessed of this unaccountable passion for levelling all distinction in dress. The lady of no quality travels first behind the lady of some quality; and a woman of sixty is as gaudy as her grand-daughter.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

## Modes and Moods

I HAVE been told by persons of experience in matters of taste that the fashions follow a law of gradation, and are never arbitrary. The new mode is always only a step onward in the same direction as the last mode, and a cultivated eye is prepared for and predicts the new fashion. This fact suggests the reason of all mistakes and offence in our modes. It is necessary in music, when you strike a discord, to let down the ear by an intermediate note or two to the accord again; and many a good experiment, born of good sense and destined to succeed, fails only because it is offensively sudden. I suppose the Parisian milliner who dresses the world from her imperious boudoir will know how to reconcile the Bloomer costume to the eye of mankind, and make it triumphant over *Punch* himself, by interposing the just gradations.

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

## The Rustic Style

SYLVIA was knitting away vigorously, thinking all the while that it was a great pity she had not put on a better gown, or even a cap with brighter ribbon, and quite unconscious how very pretty she looked standing against the faint light, her head a little bent down; her hair catching bright golden touches, as it fell from under her little linen cap; her pink bedgown, confined by her apron-string, giving a sort of easy grace to her figure; her dark, full linsey petticoat short above her trim ankles, looking far more suitable to the place where she was standing than her long gown of the night before would have done.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell.

THE peacock, in all his pride, does not display half the colours that appear in the garments of a British lady when she is dressed.

Joseph Addison

## In Victorian Times

THE Queen's choice of dress on this auspicious occasion was even less happy than usual, for she drove through Cambridge, on the morning of the installation wearing a claret-coloured silk gown striped with black, an amber-coloured Indian shawl embroidered with a wreath of flowers, and a bonnet of lilac-coloured silk covered with lace and ornamented with flowers. A mixture of colours so bizarre that criticism fails.

Clare Jerrold.

## A Man's View

AT once he thought of blue coats and skirts. It was a great relief to think of that, and he had a vision of Sue always trim in blue coats and skirts with . . . with . . . well, what did they call that white thing women wore under the coat, a thing with a low neck? And patent leather boots, of course. It sounded a little hot for summer, and he vaguely remembered having seen Theresa in something made of linen, something claret-coloured, but it looked rather crumpled, and he vaguely hated her that day. "Still," he thought, grudgingly, "she must have linen for the summer." And now he had a vision of Sue, looking very fresh, all in white drill, with white shoes, and no bangles. It did not strike him to wonder whether that stuff would crumple. He was a man. He saw his wife as a fashion-plate.

W. L. George.

## Clothes and the Man

NEITHER in tailoring nor in legislation does man proceed by mere Accident, but the hand is ever guided on by mysterious operations of the mind. In all his Modes, and habilatory endeavours, an Architectural Idea will be found lurking; his Body and the Cloth are the site and materials whereon and whereby his beautiful edifice, of a Person, is to be built. Whether he flow gracefully out in folded mantles, based on light sandals; tower up in high headgear, from amid peaks, spangles and bill-girdles; swell-out in starched ruffs, buckram stuffings, and monstrous tuberosities; or girth himself into separate sections and front the world an Agglomeration of four limbs—will depend on the nature of such Architectural Idea: whether Grecian, Gothic, Later-Gothic, or altogether Modern, and Parisian or Anglo-Dandiacal. Again, what meaning lies in Colour! From the soberest drab to the high-flaming scarlet, spiritual idiosyncracies unfold themselves in choice of Colour: if the cut betoken Intellect and Talent, so does the Colour betoken Temper and Heart. In all which, among nations as among individuals, there is an incessant indubitable, though infinitely complex working of Cause and Effect: every snip of the Scissors has been regulated and prescribed by ever-active Influences, which doubtless to Intelligences of a superior order are neither invisible nor illegible.

THOMAS CARLYLE.

ALL that Fancy's self has feigned
In a bandbox is contained:
Painted lawns, and chequered shades,
Crape, that's worn by love-lorn maids,
Watered tabbies, flowered brocades;
Violets, pinks, Italian posies,
Myrtles, jessamine and roses,
Aprons, caps, and 'kerchiefs clean,
Straw-built hats, and bonnets green,
Catgut, gauzes, tippets, ruffs,
Fans and hoods, and feathered muffs,
Stomachers, and Paris-nets,
Ear-rings, necklaces, aigrets,
Fringes, bloûds and mignionets;
Fine vermillion for the cheek,
Velvet patches *à la grecque.*
Come, but don't forgot the gloves,
Which, with all the smiling loves,
Venus caught young Cupid picking
From the tender breast of chicken. CHRISTOPHER ANSTEY.

## Queen Boadicea's Dress

HER light hair fell down her shoulders. She wore a torque of gold, a tunic of several colours, all in folds, and over it, fastened by a fibula or brooch, a robe of coarse stuff. DION CASSIUS.

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# October

*Of a lovers' quarrel and how it was healed*

**By WARWICK DEEPING**

MONSIEUR GRANDET and Madame Everard had not spoken to each other for five years.

They lived door by door in the village of Le Plessiel, and their gardens and orchards went hand in hand down hill to the willows and the river. A high hedge separated the two properties, and both Monsieur Grandet and Madame Everard had encouraged the growth of that hedge. There were two thin places in the hedge where elm trees had been cut down. Monsieur Grandet kept his tumbril tilted against one of these gaps; Madame Everard had obscured the other with a hen-house.

Old Grandet was a veteran of 1870, a tall, lean, handsome old man with a white head and the face of a Cæsar. He was very kind, very obstinate, and extraordinarily proud.

Fanchette Everard was a pretty little woman with soft grey hair, brown eyes and a quick colour. She had the fire of a Gascon and the stubbornness of a Fleming. Thirty years ago Gilles Grandet had wanted to marry her. They had been in love with each other, but something had intervened.

Le Plessiel could never quite understand that feud.

As Mme. Margot, of the *Coq d'Or*, put it: "Two such decent people. Grandet has the manners of an *aristo*. And Fanchette is so pretty, my dear, although she is five and fifty. Something of a spitfire, of course."

M. Crampon, the schoolmaster, had a theory of his own: "*Tonnerre*. What do people quarrel about? Why, about nothing. Your rabbits get out and eat your neighbour's winter greens. Your children have a squabble, and François tears Marie's apron. That's how the thing begins. And some people will never be put in the wrong. They shut their doors on each other. That's how it happens."

He was right.

There were two children to be considered—Mme. Everard's Jules and Grandet's Suzanne. As youngsters they had assumed the attitude of their elders, and even thrown rotten apples and dirt at each other over the hedge. Somewhat later Suzanne's maturity and Jules's shyness held them scornfully interested yet aloof. They looked at each other steadily when they met in the street, but they did not speak.

Suzanne was big, fair and comely, with frank eyes and a laughing mouth. Jules was dark and slim. His mother believed him to be delicate, but he passed for the army, and that was how the trouble began.

A recruit's life is not of the noblest, and Jules was a "sensitive" and a child of romance. He came on leave to Le Plessiel in the spring, saw Suzanne hanging out her linen in old Grandet's orchard, her head, the head of a Guinevere in that little world of white blossom and green mystery, and straightway fell in love with her. Grandet's wagon happened to be out on the farm; the gap in the hedge was unscreened, and Jules's shyness dared the ordeal.

"Why is it that we never speak to each other, Mademoiselle Suzanne?"

Surprised, she turned and stared at him.

"So it is little Jules. And a soldier, too!"

She was a tease, but there was no malice in her, and young Everard had courage.

"One has to go away to realise how beautiful things are," he said.

"Indeed!"

"Barrack life is so ugly, you know. It is very green and peaceful here."

That new friendship had budded quite pleasantly before it was caught and shrivelled. M. Grandet and Mme. Everard made the discovery simultaneously, and the habit of years held.

"Suzanne! Come here!"

"Jules! Jules! I will speak to you in the house."

It was absurd, preposterous, and youth knew it to be such, but parental prejudices are very obstinate, especially in France.

The autocrats had their way. The custom of the country was with them. Jules was very fond of his little mother, and Grandet had always found it difficult not to spoil Suzanne. Old people are very tenacious and very strong. Jules went back to his regiment without speaking five words to Grandet's daughter.

But he left her with three words, and they were words that counted : " I love you ! "

Old Grandet had once spoken those very words to Franchette Everard.

¶

THE war came in the midst of Jules's second leave, and the tragedy of it won him Suzanne Grandet. Their little romance began and ended in Grandet's orchard. They said good-bye there in the dusk, and Jules marched off to the station.

His mother went with him, a brave little mother with shining eyes and a white face. On the way he told her the truth, and told it her very gently like a young man confessing on Passion Sunday.

" Mother, I love Suzanne. I cannot help it."

She was silent a moment, her upper lip quivering in the facing of this double sacrifice.

" Does M. Grandet know ? "

" Not unless Suzanne has told him."

" He is a hard man, Jules."

" Who could be hard on us, just now, mother ? "

" Not I, Jules. What God wills God wills. But Gilles Grandet must speak to me."

He kissed her.

" Dear little mother. Grandet is a Frenchman. Everything will be different from to-day."

Gilles Grandet was listening to a similar confession, his forehead puckered, and his blue eyes grave and hard. Suzanne had always been so much his, and he had loved her with some of the spirit of a miser. The irony of the thing annoyed him. Fanchette's son sneaking in and taking his girl away from him !

He tried to argue and temporise, but Suzanne's youth held to the generous issue. His words were shabby, senile and unconvincing even to himself.

" You will go and speak to Mme. Everard, father ? "

He shrugged.

" She can come and see me. You will have more money than her boy."

" Think. She is all alone ; she has lost Jules ; you have me. Let us forget the old days."

Gilles Grandet put on his Sunday clothes and went as an unwilling, stiff-necked man who was fated to make a mess of so delicate a business. Mme. Everard met him with the steady eyes and the quiet manner of a woman who had made an effort to put away all pride. He sat in her best chair, awkward and uneasy, obstinately set on keeping the affair as formal as possible.

" Your boy has been making a fool of me. I suppose we must make the best of the business."

The mother in Fanchette Everard took fire at once.

" You regard it as a calamity, monsieur ! *Mon Dieu !* Your girl is a good girl, I believe, but Jules might have pleased me better ! "

Old Grandet's bronzed face hardened.

" What ! He is conferring a favour on us, is he ? Let me tell you, madame, that Suzanne's *dot* is too big for him."

There was no quenching the fire after that. Both parents felt their sacred pride affronted, and they quarrelled with bitter politeness and a ferocity that fought for son and daughter. Old Grandet got up and bowed at the end of it and walked out of the house.

" I would rather lose my land," he said, " than that my daughter should marry your son, madame."

" I would rather lose my son," she flashed at him, " and he is worth more than your land."

Gilles Grandet found Suzanne with her arms elbow-deep in the washtub. One glance at his red face and stern eyes made her guess what had happened.

" You have quarrelled with Mme. Everard, my father ? "

Her voice levelled an accusation, and he had not expected to be accused.

" The woman was insolent. We will have nothing more to do with such people."

Suzanne gave a pathetic shrug of the shoulders.

" It is hard for us all and so foolish. It is harder for Mme. Everard than for you."

Old Grandet lost his temper a second time.

" So I'm at fault, am I ? A nice girl to

take sides against her own father. A Grandet should have more pride."

"Will such pride help us to keep back the Prussians? We should be proud of men such as Jules, a man who is little more than a boy, and yet who has gone out with his heart all aflame."

"You will have nothing more to do with the puppy!" he said savagely.

Suzanne looked at him, drew her hands out of the washtub and dried them on her apron.

"I cannot stay in such a house," she said. "when all France will be bleeding. I am going to Paris. I am a strong girl and I can nurse."

"I forbid it," he answered.

'But God wills it. Are we going to keep our little coward prides when France is at war?'

Suzanne had her father's obstinacy, and the flower of her youth was a fine flame in those days. Grandet would not surrender, nor would she. He was still all laced up in buckram, in the habits and prejudices of years. He had forgotten how to weep, how to feel afraid, what the nights were like when a man could not sleep because of some great anguish, what it felt like to listen to the cries of a woman who was in labour with his child. He had been very strong, very healthy, and had known no pain.

"I forbid it'" he said.

He kept on repeating that phrase like a parrot till he came in from the fields one morning and found Suzanne gone. The house had been swept, the beds made, the crockery all washed and put away. She had left a letter for him on the kitchen table.

*If I had waited to say good-bye, my father, and asked you to kiss me, I might have been weak. No one must be weak these days. France calls us.*

Old Grandet sat down and thought it over. He did not move for half an hour, and his face looked as though it had been carved out of a block of oak.

It was in November that the news came to Le Plessiel that Jules Everard had been killed. The postmaster carried it himself to Jules's mother, and found her mending some of the boy's civilian clothes.

The postmaster stood there, hat in hand, and Fanchette Everard guessed the reason of his coming. Other women in Le Plessiel had passed through the same ordeal.

"So these clothes will not be needed. Is that what you have come to tell me, M. Valery?"

"Your courage is as great as your sacrifice," said he, with tears in his eyes.

She began to fold up the clothes, her teeth set, yet feeling that her heart was breaking.

"So that is the end of it. Well, I will put them away. He was always a good boy, was Jules!"

The postmaster made a bolt for it.

'Damn! And a widow's son, too, and the only one! Tsst! Germany!"

In the street he met old Grandet, and felt like quarrelling with him.

"Bad news again, monsieur."

"Indeed."

"Fanchette Everard has lost her son."

Gilles Grandet's eyes did not betray any emotion.

"*C'est la guerre*," he said stolidly.

The postmaster had his chance to get rid of some emotion.

"You have no son, monsieur. You think yourself safe. *Bien!* France is a mother, monsieur and the woman in there is France."

He marched off, head in air, swinging his shoulders, leaving old Grandet staring at the ground.

The soul of this French peasant felt a little uneasy and a little puzzled. He was conscious of no fear, no anxiety, nor had he any thought of fate touching him as it had touched Fanchette Everard. His attitude began by being purely impersonal. Perhaps he was even a little relieved by the idea that the barrier between himself and Suzanne had been taken away. It was a tragedy, of course, and the poor woman was to be pitied. He was quite ready to be a good neighbour, and after all he had wanted to marry her many years ago.

But Gilles Grandet had changed. A shadow of something seemed to lie across his life. He began to be conscious of a vague unrest, of a dissatisfaction with the familiar world that had satisfied him so well. He was lonely, and loneliness bred mistrust of all the solid life that had seemed so sound and sure. The war began to worry him; he had thought of its happening a long way off, but now it seemed very near.

"Suzanne must come back."

Yes, that was it. He wanted his girl back; he was beginning to starve for lack of something to love. He would write to

her, not a tyrant's letter, but he would tell her he was lonely and that poor Jules was dead. She was a good girl and she would come.

He sat up late concocting that letter, and when he had finished it he put it aside on the mantelshelf to be posted in the morning. But that letter was never posted, for next day he heard that Suzanne was dead. She had died of pneumonia in a French hospital, the hospital where she had worked as a nurse.

No one saw Gilles Grandet for two days. His door remained shut, and he did not go beyond the stable and the cow-house. The curé and the schoolmaster came to speak with him, and they found him in the stable sitting on the edge of the manger beside his old horse. His eyes stared and his face was like the face of an image.

"God has taken what He gave you, M. Grandet."

"Get out!" he said roughly. "There is no God."

He remained in that sullen, brooding state for three days. The man's humanity was dying for lack of passionate expression. His anguish was hard, savage and rebellious, the anguish of a thrifty, laborious and selfish man whose life had suddenly lost its purpose.

On the fourth morning, when old Grandet opened the door leading into the yard and the garden, he saw something lying on the oak stool that Suzanne had used for her milking. Somebody had left a little bunch of lavender with a half-sheet of paper folded round the stalks. Grandet picked up the bunch, unrolled the paper, saw that something was written on it, and this was what he read:

*From one who has lost a son for France to one who has lost a daughter. Know that my words, Gilles, were the words of an angry woman. Let us forget them. Let us remember that our children loved each other.*

Old Grandet stared at the bunch of lavender, holding it in the palm of one brown hand. His face had a puzzled and troubled look, like the face of a man who was conscious of some new pain.

Presently he turned back into the house and put the bunch of lavender in a vase on the mantelshelf. The letter he stuffed into his pocket. It accused him, but he did not fly into a rage over it; the voice of Suzanne the woman seemed to speak in that letter.

He filled his pipe, lit it, and went and stood in the doorway to think.

"I sent her no message when her boy was killed."

A voice—a new voice—was speaking to him.

"Lonely? *Mon Dieu!* She must be very lonely. And I am a man; I should be stronger than a woman. You have behaved very badly, Gilles Grandet; you have behaved like a bad Frenchman."

He raised his head and saw the wet gleam of the rising sun above the apple trees. It seemed to light up something in his blue eyes and to soften that weather-beaten face of his. He straightened up suddenly, squared his shoulders, pulled his pipe out of his mouth and nodded.

"*Allons!* Forward!"

¶

HE marched out into the orchard and stood considering something. His eyes fell on the cart blocking the thin place in the hedge. He went and pulled the cart away and pushed through into Mme. Everard's orchard. His eyes were the eyes of the peasant, the man of the land, the man who knew what was needed and what was lacking. The woodstack at the back of the garden fence was pathetically small, a few logs, a few faggots, not enough for three weeks. He walked up and had a look at the garden; it was poorly stocked as to winter greens, weeds were rampant, and it needed digging. The fruit trees in the orchard cried out for some hard cutting and pruning. There were a number of broken palings in the fence on the side of the fields.

"Of course she is poor; she must be very poor. There is the pension, a pittance. All this must be seen to."

He returned to his own place, fetched a billhook, a hurdle and a couple of stakes and made a neat gate in the hedge where the wagon had stood. He was a little shy, a little guilty, and he kept glancing at Fanchette's cottage, but she did not show herself, and he escaped undiscovered.

Gilles Grandet carted wood that day. He had a quantity ready cut in that copse of his across the stream.

Grandet was up before daylight next morning carrying logs and faggots to Fanchette's woodstack. His thoughts, however, went farther than the piling up of mere

fuel. When Mme. Everard opened her back door she found two big boxes standing there, filled with kindling and sawn logs. On the top of the pile of logs rested a sprig of lavender.

Her eyes filled with tears.

" It is the spirit of the children," she said to herself, " the spirit of Jules and Suzanne."

She pondered the matter all day, discovered the hurdle that had been placed in the hedge, and that night Gilles Grandet found a little letter thrust under his front door.

" M. Grandet," it said, " I thank you. I am a poor woman with little but bunches of lavender to give. Yet it may be that my needle may be of use. When my hands are busy I think less."

Lying on the next box of logs that was left at her doorway she found a coat that needed patching at the elbows, some socks to be darned and two shirts that lacked buttons. Cloth, thread and buttons were there also, neatly packed in an old cigar box.

She smiled a little.

"*Tiens !* But he was always methodical."

This pathetic interplay went on for weeks without the players meeting. Old Grandet was very shy, and his shyness affected Mme. Everard. Once or twice she caught a glimpse of him digging in her garden, but she kept aloof, her eyes very bright and shining ; and once she was nearly caught leaving some bread she had baked for him on the table inside his door.

One sunny day early in February she had heard the sound of boughs being lopped in the orchard. She stole out and found Grandet at work on one of her old trees, standing on a ladder, the sunlight shining on his white hair.

She made up her mind to speak to him.

" Good morning, M. Grandet."

He had not heard her crossing the grass, and in his surprise he dropped the pruning-saw he was using.

" Good morning, Mme. Everard."

" It is very good of you to take so much trouble," she said, picking up the saw and handing it to him.

" It is no trouble at all," he answered, suddenly aware of her brown eyes and pretty grey hair ; " it ought to have been done before, but I shall manage it."

" You must get up very early these days."

" It is good to get up early."

"Ah, if you do not sleep well, yes."

He nodded his head and resumed his work, and from that day they consented to speak to each other once or twice a week, but they were always very formal and polite.

In due course spring came to the village of Le Plessiel, spring with a stealthy shimmer of early green, fruit buds blushing pink and a rich rankness in the orchards and meadows. Birds sang ; the cuckoo called, flying from copse to copse. There were masses of marsh-marigolds in the stream at the end of Mme. Everard's garden. Old Grandet had planted wallflowers under her window, and the first scent of them on the first warm day was like a pain over the heart.

The greenness, the beauty, the wild pathos of a blackbird's song ! Growth everywhere, joy, a mating of birds, flowers in the meadows. The youth and exultation of it all hurt the woman who had lost her son and the man who had lost his daughter. Fanchette Everard sat at her window, lips aquiver, hands listless in her lap. Old Grandet's eyes had a dim look ; he walked about slowly, rather like a man who had lost his way.

One perfect evening he marched out with his hoe over his shoulder to draw some seed drills in Mme. Everard's garden.

The white of the orchard was merging into green. Slants of yellow sunlight struck between the trees and painted yellow patterns on the vivid grass.

Grandet had reached the hurdle in the hedge when he drew up and stood absolutely still.

Over yonder Fanchette Everard was leaning against one of the apple trees, her hands over her face. She was weeping, weeping like a woman who had conquered herself for weeks and had then been surprised and broken by some passionate and sudden anguish. There was something so childish and lost and grievous about her weeping that old Grandet began to tremble and a thickness came into his throat.

He understood. It was the spring, the mockery of these green leaves, the loneliness, the thought of the boy who was dead. Had he not felt it himself, waited to hear Suzanne singing and tried to lose himself again in his work ? But there was a new emotion in him on this rare evening in May, a great yearning that had been gathering like the sap in an old tree.

He dropped the hoe, pulled back the hurdle and crossed the grass.

" Fanchette ! "

She let her hands fall and stood trembling.

"Gilles! But I did not know."

Old Grandet looked at her with the sun on his white head.

"It is quite wrong, quite wrong," he said huskily, "and it is I who have been in the wrong all these years. You are such a little thing, Fanchette, and it is I who should be looking after you."

She began to weep again, very much like a child.

"I'm so lonely, Gilles. The boy is dead, but my heart is not dead with him. You see, he used to play in the orchard. He had his swing over there. And do you remember how—how your girl used to sing, Gilles?"

Old Grandet's eyes were wet.

"*Mon Dieu!* Don't cry like that, Fanchette. See here, I want to look after you, take care of you. What have I been doing all these years?"

He got one of his brown arms round her, and her head came to rest on his shoulder.

"But I am an old woman, Gilles."

"And I'm not a boy, am I? Come, don't tremble so, little Fanchette. Just hold on to old Gilles. He is going to take care of you."

They stood there like young lovers, and presently, in the fall of the dusk, Fanchette's calmness returned and a child's smile came into her eyes.

"You won't quarrel with me, Gilles?"

"Quarrel! How absurd! That cantankerous duffer old Grandet—let me tell him a thing or two. And now *allons*, Fanchette, will you honour me by walking into the house?"

He was bending and offering her his arm, his blue eyes shining, the old courtier, the kindly man alive once more.

"Should I walk into your house, Gilles, or should you walk into mine?"

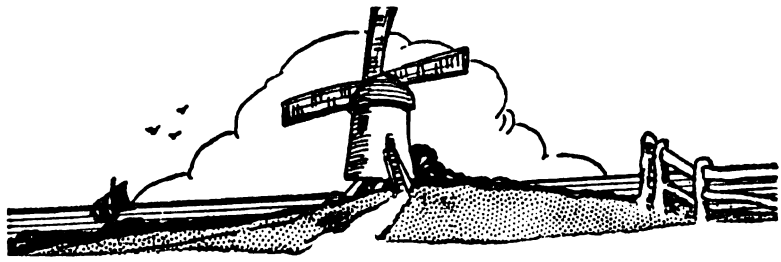
"Whichever you please, Mme. Grandet."

"Gilles!"

"I've given up quarrelling."

She pressed his arm.

"Gilles, then I will walk into yours."



# *Love's Secret*

NEVER seek to tell thy love,
Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind doth move
Silently, invisibly.

I told my love, I told my love,
I told her all my heart,
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears.
Ah! she did depart!

Soon after she was gone from me,
A traveller came by,
Silently, invisibly:
He took her with a sigh.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

# To Kill a Man

*A dangerous game and two ways of playing it*

By JACK LONDON

THOUGH dim night-lights burned, she moved familiarly through the big rooms and wide halls, seeking vainly the half-finished book of verse she had mislaid and only now remembered. When she turned on the lights in the drawing-room, she disclosed herself clad in a sweeping negligée gown of soft, rose-coloured stuff, throat and shoulders smothered in lace. Her rings were still on her fingers, her massed, yellow hair had not yet been taken down. She was delicately, gracefully beautiful, with slender, oval face, red lips, a faint colour in the cheeks, and blue eyes of the chameleon sort that, at will, stare wide with the innocence of girlhood, go hard and grey and brilliantly cold, or flame up in hot wilfulness and mastery.

She turned the lights off and passed out and down the hall toward the morning-room. At the entrance she paused and listened. From farther on had come, not a noise, but an impression of movement. She could have sworn she had not heard anything, yet something had been different. The atmosphere of night quietude had been disturbed. She wondered what servant could be prowling about. Not the butler, who was notorious for retiring early save on special occasion. Nor could it be her maid, whom she had permitted to go that evening.

Passing on to the dining-room, she found the door closed. Why she opened it and went in, she did not know, except for the feeling that the disturbing factor, whatever it might be, was there. The room was in darkness, and she felt her way to the button and pressed. As the blaze of light flashed on, she stepped back and cried out. It was a mere " Oh ! " and it was not loud.

Facing her, alongside the button, flat against the wall, was a man. In his hand, pointed toward her, was a revolver. She noticed, even in the shock of seeing him, that the weapon was black and exceedingly long-barrelled. She knew it for what it was, a Colt's. He was a medium-sized man, roughly clad, brown-eyed, and swarthy with sunburn. He seemed very cool. There was no wobble to the revolver, and it was directed toward her stomach, not from an outstretched arm, but from the hip, against which the forearm rested.

" Oh," she said. " I beg your pardon. You startled me. What do you want ? "

" I reckon I want to get out," he answered, with a humorous twitch to the lips. " I've kind of lost my way in this here shebang, and if you'll kindly show me the door I'll cause no trouble and sure vamoose."

" But what are you doing here ? " she demanded, her voice touched with the sharpness of one used to authority.

" Plain robbing, miss, that's all. I came snoopin' around to see what I could gather up. I thought you wasn't to home, seein' as I saw you pull out with your old man in an auto. I reckon that must a ben your pa, and you're Miss Setliffe."

Mrs. Setliffe saw his mistake, appreciated the naïve compliment and decided not to undeceive him.

" How do you know I am Miss Setliffe ? " she asked.

" This is old Setliffe's house, ain't it ? "

She nodded.

" I didn't know he had a daughter, but I reckon you must be her. And now, if it ain't botherin' you too much, I'd be obliged if you'd show me the way out."

" But why should I ? You are a robber, a burglar."

" If I wan't an ornery shorthorn at the business, I'd be accumulatin' them rings on your fingers instead of being polite," he retorted. " I come to make a raise outa old Setliffe, and not to be robbing womenfolks. If you get outa the way, I reckon I can find my own way out."

Mrs. Setliffe was a keen woman, and she felt that from such a man there was little to fear. That he was not a typical criminal, she was certain. From his speech she knew he was not of the cities, and she seemed

to sense the wider, homelier air of large spaces.

"Suppose I screamed?" she queried, curiously. "Suppose I made an outcry for help? you couldn't shoot me?—a woman?"

She noted the fleeting bafflement in his brown eyes. He answered slowly and thoughtfully, as if working out a difficult problem.

"I reckon, then, I'd have to choke you and maul you some bad."

"A woman?"

"I'd sure have to," he answered, and she saw his mouth set grimly. "You're only a soft woman, but you see, miss, I can't afford to go to jail. No, miss, I sure can't. There's a friend of mine waitin' for me out West. He's in a hole, and I've got to help him out." The mouth shaped even more grimly. "I guess I could choke you without hurting you much to speak of."

Her eyes took on a baby stare of innocent incredulity as she watched him.

"I never met a burglar before," she assured him, "and I can't begin to tell you how interested I am."

"I'm not a burglar, miss. Not a real one," he hastened to add, as she looked her amused unbelief. "It looks like it, me being here in your house. But it's the first time I ever tackled such a job. I needed the money—bad. Besides, I kind of look on it like collecting what's coming to me."

"I don't understand," she smiled encouragingly. "You come here to rob, and to rob is to take what is not yours."

"Yes, and no, in this here particular case. But I reckon I'd better be going now."

He started for the door of the dining-room, but she interposed, and a very beautiful obstacle she made herself. His left hand went out as if to grip her, then hesitated. He was patently awed by her soft womanhood.

"There!" she cried, triumphantly. "I knew you wouldn't.

The man was embarrassed.

"I ain't never manhandled a woman yet," he explained, "and it don't come easy. But I sure will, if you set to screaming."

"Won't you stay a few minutes and talk?" she urged. "I'm so interested. I should like to hear you explain how burglary is collecting what is coming to you."

He looked at her admiringly.

"I always thought womenfolks were scairt of robbers," he confessed. "But you don't seem none."

She laughed gaily.

"There are robbers and robbers, you know. I am not afraid of you, because I am confident you are not the sort of creature that would harm a woman. Come, talk with me awhile. Nobody will disturb us. I am all alone. My—my father caught the night train to New York. The servants are all asleep. I should like to give you something to eat—women always prepare midnight suppers for the burglars they catch, at least they do in the magazine stories. But I don't know where to find the food. Perhaps you will have something to drink?"

He hesitated, and did not reply; but she could see the admiration for her growing in his eyes.

"You're not afraid?" she queried. "I won't poison you, I promise. I'll drink with you to show you it is all right."

"You sure are a surprise package of all right," he declared, for the first time lowering the weapon and letting it hang at his side. "No one don't need to tell me ever again that womenfolks in cities are afraid. You ain't much—just a little soft, pretty thing. But you've sure got the spunk. And you're trustful on top of it. There ain't many women, or men either, who'd treat a man with a gun the way you're treating me."

She smiled her pleasure in the compliment, and her face was very earnest as she said:

"That is because I like your appearance. You are too decent-looking a man to be a robber. You oughtn't to do such things. If you are in bad luck you should go to work. Come, put away that nasty revolver and let us talk it over. The thing for you to do is to work."

"Not in this burg," he commented, bitterly. "I've walked two inches of my legs trying to find a job. Honest, I was a fine, large man once—before I started looking for a job."

The merry laughter with which she greeted his sally obviously pleased him, and she was quick to note and take advantage of it. She moved directly away from the door and toward the sideboard.

"Come, you must tell me all about it while I get that drink for you. What will it be? Whisky?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said, as he followed her, though he still carried the big revolver at his side, and though he glanced reluctantly at the unguarded open door.

She filled a glass for him at the sideboard.

"I promised to drink with you," she said, hesitatingly. "But I don't like whisky. I—I prefer sherry."

She lifted the sherry bottle tentatively for his consent.

"Sure," he answered, with a nod. "Whisky's a man's drink. I never like to see women at it. Wine's more their stuff."

She raised her glass to his, her eyes meltingly sympathetic.

"Here's to finding you a good position—"

But she broke off at sight of the expression of surprised disgust on his face. The glass, barely touched, was removed from his wry lips.

"What is the matter?" she asked, anxiously. "Don't you like it? Have I made a mistake?"

"It's sure funny whisky. Tastes like it got burned and smoked in the making."

"Oh! How silly of me! I gave you Scotch. Of course you are accustomed to rye. Let me change it."

She was almost solicitously maternal, as she replaced the glass with another, and sought and found the proper bottle.

"Better?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. No smoke in it. It's sure the real good stuff. I ain't had a drink in a week. Kind of slick, that; oily, you know; not made in a chemical factory."

"You are a drinking man?"

It was half a question, half a challenge.

"No, ma'am, not to speak of. I have rared up and ripsnorted at spells, but most unfrequent. But there is times when a good stiff jolt lands on the right spot kerchunk, and this is sure one of them. And now, thanking you for your kindness, ma'am, I'll just be a pulling along."

But Mrs. Setliffe did not want to lose her burglar. She was too poised a woman to possess much romance, but there was a thrill about the present situation that delighted he. Besides, she knew there was no danger. The man, despite his jaw and the steady, brown eyes, was eminently tractable. Also, farther back in her consciousness glimmered the thought of an audience of admiring friends. It was too bad not to have that audience.

"You haven't explained how burglary, in your case, is merely collecting what's your own," she said. "Come, sit down, and tell me about it—here at the table."

She manœuvred for her own seat and placed him across the corner from her. His alertness had not deserted him, as she noted, and his eyes roved sharply about, returning always with a smouldering admiration to hers, but never resting long. And she noted, likewise, that while she spoke, he was intent on listening for other sounds than those of her voice. Nor had he relinquished the revolver, which lay at the corner of the table between them, the butt close to his right hand

¶

BUT he was in a new habitat which he did not know. This man from the West, cunning in woodcraft and plainscraft, with eyes and ears open, tense and suspicious, did not know that under the table close to her foot, was the push-button of an electric bell. He had never heard or dreamed of such a contrivance, and his keenness and wariness went for naught.

"It's like this, miss," he began, in response to her urging, "old Setliffe done me up in a little deal once. It was raw, but it worked. Anything will work full and legal when it's got a few hundred million behind it. I'm not squealin', and I ain't taking a slam at your pa. He don't know me from Adam, and I reckon he don't know he done me outa anything. He's too big, thinking and dealing in millions, to ever hear of a small potato like me. He's an operator. He's got all kinds of experts thinking and planning and working for him, some of them, I hear, getting more cash salary than the President of the United States. I'm only one of thousands that have been done up by your pa, that's all.

"You see, ma'am, I had a little hole in the ground—a dinky hydraulic, one-horse outfit of a mine. And when Setliffe crowd shook down Idaho, and reorganized the smelter trust, and roped in the rest of the landscape, and put through the big hydraulic scheme at Twin Pines, why I sure got squeezed. I never had a run for my money. I was scratched off the card before the first heat. And so, to-night, being broke and my friend needing me bad, I just dropped around to make a raise outa your pa. Seeing as I needed it, it kinda was coming to me."

"Granting all that you say is so," she said, "nevertheless it does not make house-breaking any the less house-breaking. You couldn't make such a defence in a court of law."

"I know that," he confessed, meekly

"What's right ain't always legal. And that's why I am so uncomfortable a-settin' here and talking with you. Not that I ain't enjoying your company—I sure do enjoy it—but I just can't afford to be caught. I know what they's do to me in this here city. There was a young fellow that got fifty years only last week for holding a man up on the street for two dollars and eighty-five cents. I read about it in the paper. When times is hard and they ain't no work, men get desperate. And then the other men who've got something to be robbed of, get desperate, too, and they just sure soak it to the other fellows. If I got caught, I reckon I wouldn't get a mite less than ten years. That's why I'm hankering to be on my way."

"No, wait." She lifted a detaining hand, at the same time removing her foot from the bell, which she had been pressing intermittently. "You haven't told me your name yet."

He hesitated.

"Call me Dave."

"Then—Dave——" she laughed with pretty confusion. "Something must be done for you. You are a young man, and you are just at the beginning of a bad start. If you begin by attempting to collect what you think is coming to you, later on you will be collecting what you are perfectly sure isn't coming to you. And you know what the end will be. Instead of this, we must find something honourable for you to do."

"I need the money, and I need it now," he replied, doggedly. It's not for myself, but for that friend I told you about. He's in a peck of trouble, and he's got to get his lift now or not at all."

"I can find you a position," she said, quickly. "And, yes, the very thing!—I'll lend you the money you want to send to your friend. This you can pay back out of your salary."

"About three hundred would do," he said, slowly. "Three hundred would pull him through. I'd work my fingers off for a year for that, and my keep, and few cents to buy Bull Durham with."

"Ah! You smoke! I never thought of it."

Her hand went out over the revolver toward his hand, as she pointed to the telltale yellow stain on his fingers. At the same time her eyes measured the nearness of her own hand and of his to the weapon. She ached to grip it in one swift movement. She was sure she could do it, and yet she was not sure; and so it was that she refrained as she withdrew her hand.

"Won't you smoke?" she invited.

"I'm 'most dying to."

"Then do so. I don't mind. I really like it—cigarettes, I mean."

With his left hand he dipped into his side pocket, brought out a loose, wheat-straw paper, and shifted it to his right hand close by the revolver. Again he dipped, transferring to the paper a pinch of brown, flaky tobacco. Then he proceeded, both hands just over the revolver, to roll the cigarette.

"From the way you hover close to that nasty weapon, you seem to be afraid of me," she challenged.

"Not exactly afraid of you, ma'am, but, under the circumstances, just a mite timid."

"But I've not been afraid of you."

"You've got nothing to lose."

"My life," she retorted.

"That's right," he acknowledged promptly. "And you ain't been scairt of me. Mebbe I am over-anxious."

"I wouldn't cause you any harm." Even as she spoke, her slipper felt for the bell and pressed it. At the same time her eyes were earnest with a plea of honesty. "You are a judge of men. I know it. And of women. Surely, when I am trying to persuade you from a criminal life and to get you honest work to do——?"

He was immediately contrite.

"I sure beg your pardon, ma'am," he said. "I reckon my nervousness ain't complimentary."

As he spoke he drew his right hand from the table, and after lighting the cigarette, dropped it by his side.

"Thank you for your confidence," she breathed softly, resolutely keeping her eyes from measuring the distance to the revolver, and keeping her foot pressed firmly on the bell.

"About that three hundred," he began. "I can telegraph it West to-night. And I'll agree to work a year for it and my keep."

"You will earn more than that. I can promise seventy-five dollars a month at the least. Do you know horses?"

His face lighted up and his eyes sparkled.

"Then go to work for me—or for my father, rather, though I engage all the servants. I need a second coachman——"

"And wear a uniform?" he interrupted sharply, the sneer of the free-born West in his voice and on his lips.

She smiled tolerantly.

" Evidently that won't do. Let me think. Yes. Can you break and handle colts ? "

He nodded.

" We have a stock farm, and there's room for just such a man as you. Will you take it ? "

" Will I, ma'am ? " His voice was rich with gratitude and enthusiasm. " Show me to it. I'll dig right in to-morrow. And I can sure promise you one thing, ma'am. You'll never be sorry for lending Hughie Luke a hand in his trouble——"

" I thought you said I was to call you Dave," she chided forgivingly.

" I did, ma'am. I did. And I sure beg your pardon. It was just plain bluff. My real name is Hughie Luke. And if you'll give me the address of that stock farm of yours, and the railroad fare, I head for it first thing in the morning."

## q

THROUGHOUT the conversation she had never relaxed her attempts on the bell. She had pressed it in every alarming way—three short and a long, two and a long, and five. She had tried long series of shorts, and, once, she had held the button down for a solid three minutes. And she had been divided between objurgation of the stupid, heavy-sleeping butler, and doubt if the bell were in order.

" I am so glad," she said ; " so glad that you are willing. There won't be much to arrange. But you will first have to trust me while I go upstairs for my purse." She saw the doubt flicker momentarily in his eyes, and added hastily, " But you see I am trusting you with the three hundred dollars."

" I believe you, ma'am," he came back gallantly. " Though I just can't help this nervousness."

" Shall I go and get it ? "

But before she could receive consent, a slight, muffled jar from the distance came to her ear. She knew it for the swing-door of the butler's pantry. But so slight was it —more a faint vibration than a sound—that she would not have heard had not her ears been keyed and listening for it. Yet the man heard. He was startled in his composed way."

" What was that ? " he demanded.

For answer, her left hand flashed out to the revolver and brought it back. She had had the start of him, and she needed it, for the next instant his hand leaped up from his side, clutching emptiness where the revolver had been.

" Sit down ! " she commanded sharply, in a voice new to him. " Don't move. Keep your hands on the table."

She had taken a lesson from him. Instead of holding the heavy weapon extended, the butt of it and her forearm rested on the table, the muzzle pointed, not at his head, but his chest. And he, looking coolly and obeying her commands, knew there was no chance of the kick-up of the recoil producing a miss. Also, he saw that the revolver did not wobble, nor the hand shake, and he was thoroughly conversant with the size of hole the soft-nosed bullets could make. He had eyes, not for her, but for the hammer, which had risen under the pressure of her forefinger on the trigger.

" I reckon I'd best warn you that that there trigger-pull is filed dreadful fine. Don't press too hard, or I'll have a hole in me the size of a walnut."

She slacked the hammer partly down.

" That's better," he commented. " You'd best put it down all the way. You see how easy it works. If you want to, a quick light pull will jiffy her up and back and make a pretty mess all over your nice floor."

A door opened behind him, and he heard somebody enter the room. But he did not turn his head. He was looking at her, and he found it the face of another woman—hard, cold, pitiless, yet brilliant in its beauty. The eyes, too, were hard, though blazing with a cold light.

" Thomas," she commanded, " go to the telephone and call the police. Why were you so long in answering ? "

" I came as soon as I heard the bell, madam," was the answer.

The robber never took his eyes from hers, nor did she from his, but at mention of the bell she noticed that his eyes were puzzled for the moment.

" Beg your pardon," said the butler, from behind, " but wouldn't it be better for me to get a weapon and arouse the servants ? "

" No, ring for the police. I can hold this man. Go and do it—quickly."

The butler slippered out of the room, and the man and woman sat on, gazing into each other's eyes. To her it was an experience keen with enjoyment, and in her mind was the gossip of her crowd, and she saw notes in the Society weeklies of the beautiful young Mrs. Setliffe capturing an armed

robber single-handed. It would create a sensation, she was sure.

" When you get that sentence you mentioned," she said, coldly, " you will have time to meditate upon what a fool you have been, taking other persons' property and threatening women with revolvers. You will have time to learn your lesson thoroughly. Now tell the truth. You haven't any friend in trouble. All that you told me was lies."

He did not reply. Though his eyes were upon her, they seemed blank. In truth, for the instant she was veiled to him, and what he saw was the wide, sunwashed spaces of the West, where men and women were bigger than the rotten denizens, as he had encountered them, of the East.

" Go on. Why don't you speak ? Why don't you lie some more ? Why don't you beg to be let off ? "

" I might," he answered, licking his dry lips. " I might ask to be let off if—— "

" If what ? " she demanded, peremptorily.

" I was trying to think of a word you reminded me of. As I was saying, I might if you was a decent woman."

" Be careful," she warned.

" You don't dast kill me," he sneered. " The world's a pretty low down place to have a thing like you prowling around in it, but it ain't so plumb low down, I reckon, as to let you put a hole in me. You're sure bad, but the trouble with you is that you're weak in your badness. It ain't much to kill a man, but you ain't got it in you."

" Be careful of what you say," she repeated. " Or else, I warn you, it will go hard with you."

" Something's the matter with God," he remarked, irrelevantly, " to be letting you around loose. It's clean beyond me what He's up to, playing such-like tricks on poor humanity. Now, if I was God——"

His further opinion was interrupted by the entrance of the butler.

" Something is wrong with the telephone, madam," he announced. " The wires are crossed. I can't get Central."

" Go and call one of the servants," she ordered. " Send him out for an officer, and then return here."

Again the pair were left alone.

" Will you kindly answer one question, ma'am ? " the man said. " That servant fellow said something about a bell. I watched you like a cat, and you sure rung no bell."

" It was under the table, you poor fool. I pressed it with my foot."

" Thank you, ma'am. I reckoned I'd seen your kind before, and now I sure know I have. I spoke to you true and trusting, and all the time you was lying like hell to me."

She laughed mockingly.

" Go on. Say what you wish. It is very interesting."

" You made eyes at me, looking soft and kind, playing up all the time the fact that you wore skirts instead of pants—and all the time with your foot on the bell under the table. Well, there's some consolation. I'd sooner be poor Hughie Luke, doing his ten years, than be in your skin. Ma'am, hell is full of women like you."

There was silence for a space, in which the man, never taking his eyes from her, studying her, was making up his mind.

" Go on," she urged. " Say something."

" Yes, ma'am, I'll say something. I'll sure say something. Do you know what I'm going to do ? I'm going to get right up from this chair and walk out that door. I'd take the gun from you, only you might turn foolish and let it go off. You can have the gun. It's a good one. As I was saying, I am going right out that door. And you ain't going to pull that gun off either. It takes guts to shoot a man, and you sure ain't got them. Now get ready and see if you can pull that trigger. I ain't going to harm you. I'm going out that door, and I'm starting."

Keeping his eyes fixed on her, he pushed back the chair and slowly stood erect. The hammer rose halfway. She watched it. So did he.

" Pull harder," he advised. " It ain't half up yet. Go on and pull it and kill a man. That's what I said, kill a man, spatter his brains out on the floor, or slap a hole into him the size of your fist. That's what killing a man means."

The hammer lowered jerkily but gently. The man turned his back and walked slowly to the door. She swung the revolver around so that it bore on his back. Twice again the hammer came halfway and was reluctantly eased down.

At the door the man turned for a moment before passing on. A sneer was on his lips. He spoke to her in a low voice, almost drawling, but it was the quintessence of all loathing as he called her a name unspeakable and vile.

# The Paradise of Choice

## *"This gaol is too big"*

### By "Q"

IT was not as in certain toy houses that foretell the weather by means of a man-doll and a woman-doll—the man going in as the woman comes out, and *vice versâ*. In this case both man and woman stepped out, the man half a minute behind; so that the woman was almost at the street corner while he hesitated just outside the door, blinking up at the sky, and then dropping his gaze along the pavement.

The sky was flattened by a fog that shut down on the roofs and chimneys like a tent-cloth, white and opaque. Now and then a yellowish wave rolled across it from eastward, and the cloth would be shaken. When this happened, the street was always filled with gloom, and the receding figure of the woman lost in it for a while.

The man thrust a hand into his trousers pocket, pulled out a penny, and after considering for a couple of seconds, spun it carelessly. It fell in his palm, tail up; and he regarded it as a sailor might a compass. The trident in Britannia's hand pointed westward, down the street.

"West it is," he decided with a shrug, implying that all the four quarters were equally to his mind. He was pocketing the coin, when footsteps approached, and he lifted his head. It was the woman returning. She halted close to him with an undecided manner, and the pair eyed each other.

We may know them as Adam and Eve, for both were beginning a world that contained neither friends nor kin. Both had very white hands and very short hair. The man was tall and meagre, with a receding forehead and a sandy complexion that should have been freckled, but was not. He had a trick of half-closing his eyes when he looked at anything, not screwing them up as seamen do, but appearing rather to drop a film over them like the inner eyelid of a bird. The woman's eyes resembled a hare's, being brown and big, and set far back, so that she seemed at times to be looking right behind her. She wore a faded look, from her dust-coloured hair to her boots, which wanted blacking.

"It all seems so wide," she began; "so wide——"

"I'm going west," said the man, and started at a slow walk. Eve followed, a pace behind his heels, treading almost in his tracks. He went on, taking no notice of her.

"How long were you in there?" she asked, after a while.

"Ten year'." Adam spoke without looking back. "'Cumulated jobs, you know."

"I was only two. Blankets it was with me. They recommended me to mercy."

"You got it," Adam commented, with his eyes fastened ahead.

The fog followed them as they turned into a street full of traffic. Its frayed edge rose and sank, was parted and joined again—now descending to the first-storey windows and blotting out the cabmen and passengers on omnibus tops, now rolling up and over the parapets of the houses and the sky-signs. It was noticeable that in the crowd that hustled along the pavement Adam moved like a puppy not yet waywise, but with lifted face, while Eve followed with her head bent, seeing nothing but his heels. She observed that his boots were hardly worn at all.

Three or four times, as they went along, Adam would eye a shop window and turn in at the door, while Eve waited. He returned from different excursions with a twopenny loaf, a red sausage, a pipe, box of lights and screw of tobacco, and a noggin or so of gin in an old soda-water bottle. Once they turned aside into a public, and had a drink of gin together. Adam paid.

Thus for two hours they plodded westward, and the fog and crowd were with them all the way—strangers jostling them by the shoulder on the greasy pavement, hansoms splashing the brown mud over them—the same din for miles. Many shops were lighting up, and from these a yellow flare streamed into the fog; or a white when it

came from the electric light; or separate beams of orange, green, and violet, when the shop was a druggist's.

Then they came to the railings of Hyde Park, and trudged down the hill alongside them to Kensington Gardens. It was yet early in the afternoon. Adam pulled up.

"Come and look," he said. "It's autumn in there," and he went in at the Victoria gate, with Eve at his heels.

"Mister, how old might you be?" she asked, encouraged by the sound of his voice.

"Thirty."

"And you've passed ten years in—in there." She jerked her head back and shivered a little.

He had stooped to pick up a leaf. It was a yellow leaf from a chestnut that reached into the fog above them. He picked it slowly to pieces, drawing full draughts of air into his lungs. "Fifteen," he jerked out, "one time and another. 'Cumulated, you know." Pausing, he added, in a matter-of-fact voice, "What I've took would come to less'n a pound's worth, altogether."

The Gardens were deserted, and the pair roamed towards the centre, gazing curiously at so much of sodden vegetation as the fog allowed them to see. Their eyes were not jaded; to them a blade of grass was not a little thing.

They were down on the south side, amid the heterogeneous plants there collected, examining each leaf, spelling the Latin labels and comparing them, when the hour came for closing. In the dense atmosphere the park-keeper missed them. The gates were shut; and the fog settled down thicker with the darkness.

Then the man and the woman were aware, and grew afraid. They saw only a limitless plain of grey about them, and heard a murmur as of the sea rolling around it.

"This gaol is too big," whispered Eve, and they took hands. The man trembled. Together they moved into the fog, seeking an outlet.

At the end of an hour or so they stumbled on a seat, and sat down for awhile to share the bread and sausage, and drink the gin. Eve was tired out and would have slept, but the man shook her by the shoulder.

"For God's sake don't leave me to face this alone. Can you sing?"

She began, "When other lips . . ." in a whisper which gradually developed into a reedy soprano. She had forgotten half the words, but Adam lit a pipe and listened appreciatively.

"Tell you what," he said at the close, "you'll be able to pick up a little on the road with your singing. We'll tramp west to-morrow, and pass ourselves off for man and wife. Likely we'll get some farm work, down in the country. Let's get out of this."

They joined hands and started off again, unable to see a foot before them in the blackness. So it happened next morning that the park-keeper, coming at his usual hour to unlock the gates, found a man and a woman inside with their white faces pressed against the railings, through which they glared like caged beasts. He set them free, and they ran out, for his paradise was too big.

¶

NOW, facing west, they tramped for two days on the Bath road, leaving the fog behind them, and drew near Reading. It was a clear night as they approached it, and the sky studded with stars that twinkled frostily. Eleven o'clock sounded from a tower ahead. On the outskirts of the town they were passing an ugly modern villa with a large garden before it, when an old gentleman came briskly up the road and turned in at the gate.

Adam swung round on his heel and followed him up the path, begging. Eve hung by the gate.

"No," said the old gentleman, fitting his latchkey into the door, "I have no work to offer. Eh?—Is that your wife by the gate? Hungry?"

Adam whispered a lie in his ear.

"Poor woman, and to be on the road, in such a state, at this hour! Well, you shall share my supper before you search for a lodging. Come inside," he called out to Eve, "and be careful of the step. It's a high one."

He led them in, past the ground-floor rooms and up a flight of stairs. After pausing on the landing and waiting a long time for Eve to take breath, he began to ascend another flight.

"Are we going to have supper on the leads?" Adam wondered.

They followed the old gentleman up to the attics and into a kind of tower, where was a small room with two tables spread, the one with a supper, the other with papers, charts, and mathematical instruments.

"Here," said their guide, "is bread, a

cold chicken, and a bottle of whisky. I beg you to excuse me while you eat. The fact is, I dabble in astronomy. My telescope is on the roof above, and to-night every moment is precious."

There was a ladder fixed in the room, leading to a trap-door in the ceiling. Up this ladder the old gentleman trotted, and in half a minute had disappeared, shutting the trap behind him.

It was half an hour or more before Adam climbed after him, with Eve, as usual, at his heels.

"My dear madam!" cried the astronomer "and in your state!"

"I told you a lie," Adam said. "I've come to beg your pardon. May we look at the stars before we go?"

In two minutes the old gentleman was pointing out the constellations—the Great Bear hanging low in the north-east, pointing to the Pole star, and across it to Cassiopeia's bright zig-zag high in the heavens; the barren square of Pegasus, with its long tail stretching to the Milky Way, and the points that cluster round Perseus; Arcturus, white Vega and yellow Capella; the Twins, and beyond them the Little Dog twinkling through a coppice of naked trees to eastward; yet further round the Pleiads climbing, with red Aldebaran after them; below them Orion's belt, and last of all, Sirius flashing like a diamond, white and red, and resting on the horizon where the dark pasture lands met the sky.

Then, growing flushed with his subject, he began to descant on these stars, their distances and velocities; how that each was a sun, careering in measureless space, each trailing a company of worlds that spun and hurtled round it; that the Dog-star's light shone into their eyes across a hundred trillion miles; that the star itself swept along a thousand miles in a minute. He hurled figures at them, heaping millions on millions. "See here"—and, turning the telescope on its pivot, he sighted it carefully. "Look at that small star in the Great Bear: that's Groombridge Eighteen-thirty. *He's* two hundred billions of miles away. *He* travels two hundred miles a second, does Groombridge Eighteen-thirty. In one minute Groombridge Eighteen-thirty could go from here to Hong-Kong."

"Then damn Groombridge Eighteen-thirty!"

It was uttered in the bated tone that night enforces: but it came with a groan. The old gentleman faced round in amazement.

"He means, sir," explained the woman, who had grown to understand Adam passing well, "my man means that it's all too big for us. We've strayed out of prison, sir, and shall feel safer back again, looking at all this behind bars."

She reached out a hand to Adam; and this time it was he that followed, as one blinded and afraid. In three months they were back again at the gates of the paradise they had wandered from. There stood a warder before it, clad in blue; but he carried no flaming sword, and the door opened and let them in.

## *AT THE MID HOUR OF NIGHT*

AT the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping, I fly
To the lone vale we loved, when life shone warm in thine eye;
And I think oft, if spirits can steal from the regions of air
To revisit past scenes of delight, thou wilt come to me there,
And tell me our love is remember'd even in the sky.

Then I sing the wild song it once was rapture to hear,
When our voices commingling breathed like one on the ear;
And as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,
I think, O my love! 'tis thy voice from the Kingdom of Souls
Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear.

THOMAS MOORE.

# TRILBY

## By GEORGE DU MAURIER

**Trilby O'Ferral is an artists' model, of loving and arresting personality. Three Bohemian Art Students, The Laird, Taffy and Little Billee, of the Latin Quarter, give her carte blanche of their studio, and it is here that she meets Svengali, a sinister and repulsive German musician endowed with marvellous hypnotic powers by means of which Trilby is cured of pain and comes under his influence.**

**Little Billee falls seriously in love with Trilby who, horrified at her previous mode of existence, gives him up. Little Billee falls ill and returns to England, but after five years' absence, during which he has won universal fame, he returns to Paris with his former friends.**

**They attend a concert where La Svengali, the world's Prima Donna, is to sing and discover that she is no other than Trilby.**

**Little Billee's love is revived but receives a sad blow when Trilby apparently does not recognise him in the Bois.**

**Trilby and Svengali come to London and, while rehearsing, Svengali is stabbed by Gecko, the violinist. At the concert Trilby sings disastrously and has to retire. Svengali is found dead in his box from heart disease.**

**Taffy takes the now broken-down Trilby to his rooms and later has her moved to Fitzroy Square, where she is cared for by Marta, a relative of Svengali. She is a hopeless invalid and has lost all recollection of her fame and only remembers the old days in Paris.**

TAFFY was allowed to see Gecko, who was remanded till the result of the *post-mortem* should be made public. But beyond inquiring most anxiously and minutely after Trilby, and betraying the most passionate concern for her, he would say nothing, and seemed indifferent as to his own fate.

When they went to Fitzroy Square, late in the afternoon, they found that many people, musical, literary, fashionable and otherwise (and many foreigners), had called to inquire after Madame Svengali, but no one had been admitted to see her. Mrs. Godwin was much elated by the importance of her new lodger.

Trilby had been writing to Angèle Boisse, at her old address in the Rue des Cloîtres Ste. Pétronille, in the hope that this letter would find her still there. She was anxious to go back and be a *blanchisseuse de fin* with her friend. It was a kind of nostalgia for Paris, the Quartier Latin, her clean old trade.

This project our three heroes did not think it necessary to discuss with her just yet; she seemed quite unfit for work of any kind.

The doctor, who had seen her again, had been puzzled by her strange physical weakness, and wished for a consultation with some special authority; Little Billee, who was intimate with most of the great physicians, wrote about her to Sir Oliver Calthorpe.

She seemed to find a deep happiness in being with her three old friends, and talked and listened with all her old eagerness and geniality, and much of her old gaiety, in spite of her strange and sorrowful position. But for this it was impossible to realise that her brain was affected in the slightest degree, except when some reference was made to her singing, and this seemed to annoy and irritate her, as though she were being made fun of. The whole of her marvellous musical career, and everything connected with it, had been clean wiped out of her recollection.

She was very anxious to get into other quarters, that Little Billee should suffer no inconvenience, and they promised to take rooms for her and Marta on the morrow.

They told her cautiously all about Svengali and Gecko; she was deeply concerned, but betrayed no such poignant anguish as might have been expected. The thought of Gecko troubled her most, and she showed much anxiety as to what might befall him.

Next day she moved with Marta to some lodgings in Charlotte Street, where everything was made as comfortable for them as possible.

Sir Oliver saw her with Dr. Thorne (the doctor who was attending her) and Dr. Jakes Talboys.

Sir Oliver took the greatest interest in her case, both for her sake and his friend

Little Billee's. Also his own, for he was charmed with her. He saw her three times in the course of the week, but could not say for certain what was the matter with her, beyond taking the very gravest view of her condition. For all he could advise or prescribe, her weakness and physical prostration increased rapidly, through no cause he could discover. Her insanity was not enough to account for it. She lost weight daily; she seemed to be wasting and fading away from sheer general atrophy.

Two or three times he took her and Marta for a drive.

On one of these occasions, as they went down Charlotte Street, she saw a shop with transparent French blinds in the window, and through them some Frenchwomen, with neat white caps, ironing. It was a French *blanchisserie de fin*, and the sight of it interested and excited her so much that she must needs insist on being put down and on going into it.

"Je voudrais bien parler à la patronne, si ça ne la dérange pas," she said.

The *patronne*, a genial Parisian, was much astonished to hear a great French lady, in costly garments, evidently a person of fashion and importance, applying to her rather humbly for employment in the business, and showing a thorough knowledge of the work (and of the Parisian workwoman's colloquial dialect). Marta managed to catch the *patronne's* eye, and tapped her forehead significantly, and Sir Oliver nodded. So the good woman humoured the great lady's fancy, and promised her abundance of employment whenever she should want it.

Employment! Poor Trilby was hardly strong enough to walk back to the carriage; and this was her last outing.

But this little adventure had filled her with hope and good spirits—for she had as yet received no answer from Angèle Boisse (who was in Marseilles), and had begun to realise how dreary the Quartier Latin would be without Jeannot, without Angèle, without the *trois Angliches* in the Place St. Anatole des Arts.

She was not allowed to see any of the strangers who came and made kind inquiries. This her doctors had strictly forbidden. Any reference to music or singing irritated her beyond measure. She would say to Marta, in bad German:

"Tell them, Marta—what nonsense it is! They are taking me for another—they are mad. They are trying to make a fool of me!"

And Marta would betray great uneasiness—almost terror—when she was appealed to in this way.

Svengali had died from heart disease. The cut he had received from Gecko had not apparently (as far as the verdict of a coroner's inquest could be trusted) had any effect in aggravating his malady or hastening his death.

But Gecko was sent for trial at the Old Bailey, and sentenced to hard labour for six months (a sentence which, if I remember aright, gave rise to much comment at the time). Taffy saw him again, but with no better result than before. He chose to preserve an obstinate silence on his relations with the Svengalis and their relations with each other.

When he was told how hopelessly ill and insane Madame Svengali was, he shed a few tears, and said: "Ah, pauvrette, pauvrette—ah, monsieur!—je l'aimais tant, je l'aimais tant! il n'y en a pas beaucoup comme elle, Dieu de misère! C'est un ange du Paradis!"

And not another word was to be got out of him.

It took some time to settle Svengali's affairs after his death. No will was found. His old mother came over from Germany, and two of his sisters, but no wife. The comic wife and the three children, and the sweet-stuff shop in Elberfeld had been humorous inventions of his own—a kind of Mrs. Harris!

He left three thousand pounds, every penny of which (and of far larger sums that he had spent) had been earned by "La Svengali," but nothing came to Trilby of this; nothing but the clothes and jewels he had given her, and in this respect he had been lavish enough; and there were countless costly gifts from emperors, kings, great people of all kinds. Trilby was under the impression that all these belonged to Marta. Marta behaved admirably; she seemed bound hand and foot to Trilby by a kind of slavish adoration, as that of a plain old mother for a brilliant and beautiful but dying child.

It soon became evident that, whatever her disease might be, Trilby had but a very short time to live.

She was soon too weak even to be taken out in a bath-chair, and remained all day in her large sitting-room with Marta; and

there, to her great and only joy, she received her three old friends every afternoon, and gave them coffee and made them smoke cigarettes of caporal as of old; and their hearts were daily harrowed as they watched her rapid decline.

Day by day she grew more beautiful in their eyes, in spite of her increasing pallor and emaciation—her skin was so pure and white and delicate, and the bones of her face so admirable!

Her eyes recovered all their old humorous brightness when *les trois Angliches* were with her, and the expression of her face was so wistful and tender for all her playfulness, so full of eager clinging to existence and to them, that they felt the memory of it would haunt them for ever, and be the sweetest and saddest memory of their lives.

Her quick, though feeble gestures, full of reminiscences of the vigorous and lively girl they had known a few years back, sent waves of pity through them and pure brotherly love; and the incomparable tones and changes and modulations of her voice, as she chatted and laughed, bewitched them almost as much as when she had sung the "Nussbaum" of Schumann in the Salle des Bashibazoucks.

Sometimes Lorrimer came, and Antony, and the Greek. It was like a genial little court of bohemia. And Lorrimer, Antony, the Laird, and Little Billee made those beautiful chalk and pencil studies of her head which are now so well known—all so singularly like her, and so singularly unlike each other! *Trilby vue á travers quatre tempéraments!*

These afternoons were probably the happiest poor Trilby had ever spent in her life—with these dear people round her, speaking the language she loved; talking of old times and jolly Paris days, she never thought of the morrow.

But later—at night, in the small hours—she would wake up with a start from some dream full of tender and blissful recollection, and suddenly realise her own mischance, and feel the icy hand of that which was to come before many morrows were over; and taste the bitterness of death so keenly that she longed to scream out loud and get up and walk up and down and wring her hands at the dreadful thought of parting for ever!

But she lay motionless and mum as a poor little frightened mouse in a trap, for fear of waking up the good old tired Marta, who was snoring at her side.

And in an hour or two the bitterness would pass away, the creeps and the horrors; and the stoical spirit of resignation would steal over her—the balm, the blessed calm, and all her old bravery would come back.

And then she would sink into sleep again, and dream more blissfully than ever, till the good Marta woke her with a motherly kiss and a fragrant cup of coffee; and she would find, feeble as she was, and doomed as she felt herself to be, that joy cometh of a morning; and life was still sweet for her, with yet a whole day to look forward to.

## ¶

ONE day she was deeply moved at receiving a visit from Mrs. Bagot, who, at Little Billee's earnest desire, had come all the way from Devonshire to see her.

As the graceful little lady came in, pale and trembling all over, Trilby rose from her chair to receive her, and rather timidly put out her hand, and smiled in a frightened manner. Neither could speak for a second. Mrs. Bagot stood stock-still by the door, gazing (with all her heart in her eyes) at the so terribly altered Trilby—the girl she had once so dreaded.

Trilby, who seemed also bereft of motion, and whose face and lips were ashen, exclaimed: "I'm afraid I haven't quite kept my promise to you, after all, but things have turned out so differently. Anyhow, you needn't have any fear of me *now*."

At the mere sound of that voice Mrs. Bagot, who was as impulsive, emotional and unregulated as her son, rushed forward, crying: "Oh, my poor girl, my poor girl!" and caught her in her arms and kissed and caressed her, and burst into a flood of tears, and forced her back into her chair, hugging her as if she were a long-lost child.

"I love you now as much as I always admired you—pray believe it!"

"Oh, how kind of you to say that!" said Trilby, her own eyes filling. "I'm not at all the dangerous or designing person you thought. I knew quite well I wasn't a proper person to marry your son all the time, and told him so again and again. It was very stupid of me to say yes at last. I was miserable directly after, I assure you. Somehow I couldn't help myself—I was driven."

"Oh, don't talk of that! Don't talk of that! You've never been to blame in any way—I've long known it—I've been full of remorse! You've been in my thoughts always, night and day. Forgive a poor jealous mother. As if *any* man could help loving you—or any woman either. Forgive me!"

"Oh, Mrs. Bagot—forgive *you!* What a funny idea! But, anyhow, you have forgiven *me*, and that's all I care for now. I was very fond of your son—as fond as could be. I am now, but in quite a different sort of way, you know—the sort of way *you* must be, I fancy! There was never another like him that I ever met—anywhere! You *must* be so proud of him; who wouldn't? *Nobody's* good enough for him. I would have been only too glad to be his servant, his humble servant! I used to tell him so—but he wouldn't hear of it—he was much too kind! He always thought of others before himself. And, oh, how rich and famous he's become! I've heard all about it, and it did me good. It does me more good to think of than anything else; far more than if I were to be ever so rich and famous myself, I can tell you!"

This from La Svengali, whose overpowering fame, so utterly forgotten by herself, was still ringing all over Europe; whose lamentable illness and approaching death were being mourned and discussed and commented upon in every capital of the civilised world, as one distressing bulletin appeared after another. She might have been a royal personage!

Mrs. Bagot knew, of course, the strange form her insanity had taken, and made no allusion to the flood of thoughts that rushed through her own brain as she listened to this towering goddess of song, this poor mad queen of the nightingales, humbly gloating over her son's success. . . .

Poor Mrs. Bagot had just come from Little Billee's, in Fitzroy Square, close by. There she had seen Taffy, in a corner of Little Billee's studio, laboriously answering endless letters and telegrams from all parts of Europe—for the good Taffy had constituted himself Trilby's secretary and *homme d'affaires*—unknown to her, of course. And this was no sinecure (though he liked it); putting aside the numerous people he had to see and be interviewed by, there were kind inquiries and messages of condolence and sympathy from nearly all the crowned heads of Europe, through their chamberlains; applications for help from unsuccessful musical strugglers all over the world to the pre-eminently successful one; beautiful letters from great and famous people, musical and otherwise; disinterested offers of service; interested proposals for engagements when the present trouble should be over; beggings for an interview from famous *impresarios*, to obtain which no distance would be thought too great, etc., etc., etc. It was endless, in English, French, German, Italian—in languages quite incomprehensible (many letters had to remain unanswered)—Taffy took an almost malicious pleasure in explaining all this to Mrs. Bagot.

Then there was a constant rolling of carriages up to the door and a thundering of Little Billee's knocker: Lord and Lady Palmerston wish to know—the Lord Chief Justice wishes to know—the Dean of Westminster wishes to know—the Marchioness of Westminster wishes to know—everybody wishes to know if there

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is any better news regarding Madame Svengali!

These were small things, truly; but Mrs. Bagot was a small person from a small village in Devonshire, and one whose heart and eye had hitherto been filled by no larger image than that of Little Billee; and Little Billee's fame, as she now discovered for the first time, did not quite fill the entire universe.

And she mustn't be too much blamed if all these obvious signs of a world-wide colossal celebrity impressed and even awed her a little.

Madame Svengali! Why, this was the beautiful girl whom she remembered so well, whom she had so grandly discarded with a word, and who had accepted her *congé* so meekly in a minute; whom, indeed, she had been cursing in her heart for years because—because what?

Poor Mrs. Bagot felt herself turn hot and red all over and humbled herself to the very dust, and almost forgot that she had been in the right, after all, and that "la grande Trilby" was certainly no fit match for her son!

So she went quite humbly to see Trilby, and found a poor pathetic mad creature still more humble than herself, who still apologised for—for what?

A poor, pathetic, mad creature who had clean forgotten that she was the greatest singer in all the world—one of the greatest artists that had ever lived; but who remembered with shame and contrition that she had once taken the liberty of yielding (after endless pressure and repeated disinterested refusals of her own, and out of sheer irresistible affection) to the passionate pleadings of a little obscure art student, a mere boy—no better off than herself—just as penniless and insignificant a nobody; but—the son of Mrs. Bagot.

All due sense of proportion died out of the poor lady as she remembered and realised all this!

And then Trilby's pathetic beauty, so touching, so winning, in its rapid decay; the nameless charm of look and voice and manner that was her special appanage, and which her malady and singular madness had only increased; her childlike simplicity, her transparent forgetfulness of self—all these so fascinated and entranced Mrs. Bagot, whose quick susceptibility to such impressions was just as keen as her son's, that she very soon found herself all but worshipping this fast-fading lily—for so she called her in her own mind—quite forgetting (or affecting to forget) on what very questionable soil the lily had been reared, and through what strange vicissitudes of evil and corruption it had managed to grow so tall and white and fragrant!

Oh, strange compelling power of weakness and grace and prettiness combined, and sweet, sincere unconscious natural manners, not to speak of world-wide fame!

For Mrs. Bagot was just a shrewd little conventional British country matron of the good upper middle-class type, bristling all over with provincial properties and respectabilities, a philistine of the philistines, in spite of her artistic instincts; one who for years had (rather unjustly) thought of Trilby as a wanton and perilous siren, an unchaste and unprincipled and most dangerous daughter of Heth.

And here she was—like all the rest of us monads and nomads and bohemians—just sitting at Trilby's feet. . . . "A washerwoman! A figure model! And Heaven knows what besides!" and she had never heard her sing!

It was truly comical to see and hear!

¶

MRS. Bagot did not go back to Devonshire. She remained in Fitzroy Square, at her son's, and spent most of her time with Trilby, doing and devising all kinds of things to distract and amuse her and lead her thoughts gently to heaven, and soften for her the coming end of all.

Trilby had a way of saying, and especially of looking, "Thank you," that made one wish to do as many things for her as one could, if only to make her say and look it again.

And she had retained much of her old, quaint and amusing manner of telling things, and had much to tell still left of her wandering life, although there were so many strange lapses in her powers of memory—gaps—which, if they could only have been filled up, would have been full of such surpassing interest!

Then she was never tired of talking and hearing of Little Billee; and that was a subject of which Mrs. Bagot could never tire either!

Then there were the recollections of her childhood. One day, in a drawer, Mrs.

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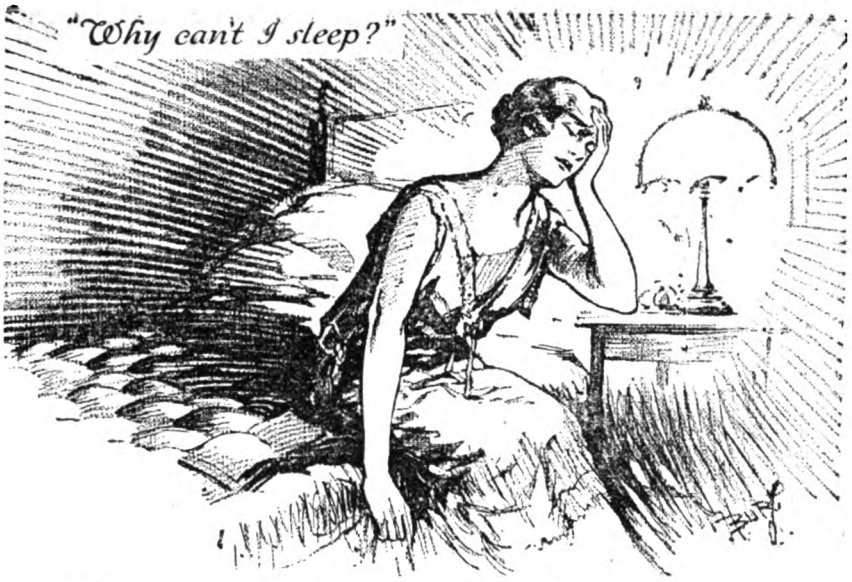


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Bagot came upon a faded daguerreotype of a woman in a Tam o' Shanter, with a face so sweet and beautiful and saintlike that it almost took her breath away. It was Trilby's mother.

"Who and what was your mother, Trilby?"

"Ah, poor mamma!" said Trilby, and she looked at the portrait a long time. "Ah, she was ever so much prettier than that! Mamma was once a *demoiselle de comptoir*—that's a barmaid, you know—at the Montagnards Ecossais, in the Rue du Poissonnière—a place where men used to drink and smoke without sitting down. That was unfortunate, wasn't it?

"Papa loved her with all his heart, although, of course, she wasn't his equal. They were married at the Embassy, in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré.

"*Her* parents weren't married at all. Her mother was the daughter of a boatman on Loch Ness, near a place called Drumnadrochit; but her father was the Honourable Colonel Desmond. He was related to all sorts of great people in England and Ireland. He behaved very badly to my grandmother and to poor mamma—his own daughter, deserted them both! Not very *honourable* of him, *was* it? And that's all I know about him."

And then she went on to tell of the home in Paris that might have been so happy but for her father's passion for drink; of her parents' deaths, and little Jeannot, and so forth. And Mrs. Bagot was much moved and interested by these naive revelations, which accounted in a measure for so much that seemed unaccountable in this extraordinary woman; who thus turned out to be a kind of cousin (though on the wrong side of the blanket) to no less a person than the famous Duchess of Towers.

With what joy would that ever kind and gracious lady have taken poor Trilby to her bosom had she only known! She had once been all the way from Paris to Vienna merely to hear her sing. But, unfortunately, the Svengalis had just then left for St. Petersburg, and so she had her long journey for nothing!

Mrs. Bagot brought her many good books and read them to her—Dr. Cummings on the approaching end of the world, and other works of a like comforting tendency for those who are just about to leave it; the *Pilgrim's Progress*, sweet little tracts, and what not.

Trilby was so grateful that she listened with much patient attention. Only now and then a faint gleam of amusement would steal over her face, and her lips would almost form themselves to ejaculate: "Oh, maïe, aïe!"

Then Mrs. Bagot, as a reward for such winning docility, would read her *David Copperfield*, and that was heavenly indeed!

But the best of all was for Trilby to look over John Leech's *Pictures of Life and Character*, just out. She had never seen any drawings of Leech before, except now and then in an occasional *Punch* that turned up in the studio in Paris. And they never palled upon her, and taught her more of the aspect of English life (the life she loved) than any book she had ever read. She laughed and laughed; and it was almost as sweet to listen to as if she were vocalising the quick part in Chopin's Impromptu.

One day she said, her lips trembling: "I can't make out why you're so wonderfully kind to me, Mrs. Bagot. I hope you have not forgotten who and what I am, and what my story is. I hope you haven't forgotten that I'm not a respectable woman?"

"Oh, my dear child—don't ask me. . . . I only know that you are you! . . . and I am I, and that is enough for me . . . you're my poor, gentle, patient, suffering daughter, whatever else you are—more sinned against than sinning, I feel sure! But there . . . I've misjudged you so, and been so unjust, that I would give worlds to make you some amends . . . besides, I should be just as fond of you if you'd committed a murder, I really believe—you're so strange, you're irresistible! Did you ever, in all your life, meet anybody that *wasn't* fond of you?"

Trilby's eyes moistened with tender pleasure at such a pretty compliment. Then after a few minutes' thought she said, with engaging candour: "No, I can't say I ever did, that I can think of just now. But I've forgotten such lots of people!"

¶

ONE day Mrs. Bagot told Trilby that her brother-in-law, Mr. Thomas Bagot, would much like to come and talk to her.

"Was that the gentleman who came with you to the studio in Paris?"

"Yes."

"Why, he's a clergyman, isn't he? What does he want to come and talk to *me* about?"

(*Continued on page* 148)

# Which do you prefer?

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" Ah, my dear child . . . ! " said Mrs. Bagot, her eyes filling.

Trilby was thoughtful for a while, and then said : " I'm going to die, I suppose. Oh, yes, oh, yes ! There's no mistake about that ! "

" Dear Trilby, we are all in the hands of an Almighty Merciful God ! " And the tears rolled down Mrs. Bagot's cheeks.

After a long pause, during which she gazed out of the window, Trilby said, in an abstracted kind of way, as though she were talking to herself : " Après tout, c'est pas déjà si raide, de claquer ! J'en ai tant vus, qui ont passé par la ! Au bout du fossé la culbute, ma foi ! "

" What are you saying to yourself in French, Trilby ? Your French is so difficult to understand ! "

" Oh, I beg your pardon ! I was thinking it's not so difficult to die, after all ! I've seen such lots of people do it. I've nursed them, you know—papa and mamma and Jeannot, and Angèle Boisse's mother-in-law, and a poor *casseur de pierres*, Colin Maigret, who lived in the Impasse des Taupes St. Germain. He'd been run over by an omnibus in the Rue Vaugirard, and had to have both his legs cut off just above the knee. They none of them seemed to mind dying a bit. They weren't a bit afraid ! *I'm* not !

" Poor people don't think much of death. Rich people shouldn't, either. They should be taught when they're quite young to laugh at it and despise it, like the Chinese. The Chinese die of laughing just as their heads are being cut off, and cheat the executioner ! It's all in the day's work, and we're all in the same boat—so who's afraid !"

" Dying is not all, my poor child ! Are you prepared to meet your Maker face to face ? Have you ever thought about God and the possible wrath to come if you should die unrepentant ? "

" Oh, but I shan't ! I've been repenting all my life ! Besides, there'll be no wrath for any of us—not even the worst ! *Il y aura amnistie générale !* Papa told me so, and he'd been a clergyman, like Mr. Thomas Bagot. I often think about God. I'm very fond of Him. One *must* have something perfect to look up to and be fond of—even if it's only an idea, even if it's too good to be true !

" Though some people don't even believe He exists ! Le père Martin didn't—but, of course, *he* was only a *chiffonnier*, and doesn't count.

" One day, though, Durien, the sculptor, who's very clever, and a very good fellow indeed, said :

" ' Vois-tu, Trilby—I'm very much afraid He doesn't really exist, le bon Dieu ! Most unfortunately for *me*, for I *adore* Him ! I never do a piece of work without thinking how nice it would be if I could only please *Him* with it ! '

" And I've often thought, myself, how heavenly it must be to be able to paint, or sculpt, or make music, or write beautiful poetry, for that very reason !

" Why, once on a very hot afternoon we were sitting, a lot of us, in the courtyard outside la mère Martin's shop, drinking coffee with an old Invalide called Bastide Lendormi, one of the Vieille Garde, who'd only got one leg and one arm and one eye, and everybody was very fond of him. Well, a model called Mimi la Salope came out of the Mont-de-piété opposite, and Père Martin called out to her to come and sit down, and gave her a cup of coffee, and asked her to sing.

" She sang a song of Béranger's, about Napoleon the Great, in which it says :

" ' Parlez-nous de lui, grandmère !
Grandmère, parlez-nous de lui ! '

I suppose she sang it very well, for it made old Bastide Lendormi cry ; and when Père Martin *blagué'd* him about it, he said :

" ' C'est égal, voyez-vous ! to sing like that is *to pray !* '

" And then I thought how lovely it would be if *I* could only sing like Mimi la Salope, and I've thought so ever since—just to *pray !* "

" *What*, Trilby ? If *you* could only sing like—— Oh, but never mind ; I forgot ! Tell me, Trilby—do you ever pray to Him, as other people pray ? "

" Pray to Him ? Well, no—not often—not in words and on my knees and with my hands together, you know ! *Thinking's* praying, very often—don't you think so ? And so's being sorry and ashamed when one's done a mean thing, and glad when one's resisted a temptation, and grateful when it's a fine day and one's enjoying one's self without hurting anyone else ! What is it but praying when you try and bear up after losing all you cared to live for ? And very good praying, too ! There can be prayers without words just as well as songs,

(*Continued on page 150*)

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(Argosy)

I suppose; and Svengali used to say that songs without words are the best!

"And then it seems mean to be always asking for things. Besides, you don't get them any the faster that way, and that shows!

"La mère Martin used to be always praying. And Père Martin used always to laugh at her; yet he always seemed to get the things *he* wanted oftenest!

"*I* prayed once, very hard indeed! I prayed for Jeannot not to die!"

"Well—but how do you *repent*, Trilby, if you do not humble yourself and pray for forgiveness on your knees?"

"Oh, well—I don't exactly know! Look here, Mrs. Bagot, I'll tell you the lowest and meanest thing I ever did. . . ."

(Mrs. Bagot felt a little nervous.)

"I'd promised to take Jeannot on Palm Sunday to St. Philippe du Roule, to hear l'abbé Bergamot. But Durien (that's the sculptor, you know) asked me to go with him to St. Germain, where there was a fair or something; and with Mathieu, who was a student in law; and a certain Victorine Letellier, who—who was Mathieu's mistress, in fact—a lace-mender in the Rue Ste. Maritorne la Pocharde. And so I went on Sunday morning to tell Jeannot that I couldn't take him.

"He cried so dreadfully that I thought I'd give up the others and take him to St. Philippe, as I'd promised. But then Durien and Mathieu and Victorine drove up and waited outside, and so I *didn't* take him, and went with them, and I didn't enjoy anything all day, and was miserable.

"They were in an open carriage with two horses; it was Mathieu's treat, and Jeannot might have ridden on the box by the coachman without being in anybody's way. But I was afraid they didn't want him, as they didn't say anything, and so I didn't dare ask—and Jeannot saw us drive away, and I *couldn't* look back! And the worst of it is that when we were half-way to St. Germain, Durien said: 'What a pity you didn't bring Jeannot!' and they were all sorry I hadn't.

"It was six or seven years ago, and I really believe I've thought of it every day, and sometimes in the middle of the night!

"Ah, and when Jeannot was dying, and when he was dead—the remembrance of that Palm Sunday!

"And if *that's* not repenting, I don't know what is!"

"Oh, Trilby, what nonsense! *That's* nothing; good heavens!—putting off a small child! I'm thinking of far worse things—when you were in the Quartier Latin, you know—sitting to painters and sculptors. . . . Surely, so attractive as you are. . . . ."

"Oh, yes. . . . I know what you mean—it was horrid, and I was frightfully ashamed of myself; and it wasn't amusing a bit; *nothing* was, till I met your son and Taffy and dear Sandy M'Allister! But then it wasn't deceiving or disappointing anybody, or hurting their feelings—it was only hurting myself!

"Besides, all that sort of thing, in women, is punished severely enough down here, God knows, unless one's a Russian empress, like Catherine the Great, or a grande dame like lots of them, or a great genius like Madame Rachael or George Sand!

"Why, if it hadn't been for that, and sitting for the figure, I should have felt myself good enough to marry your son, *although* I was only a *blanchisseuse de fin*—you've said so yourself!

"And I should have made him a good wife—of that I feel sure. He wanted to live all his life at Barbizon, and paint, you know; and didn't care for society in the least. Anyhow, I should have been equal to such a life as that! Lots of their wives are *blanchisseuses* over there, or people of that sort; and they get on very well indeed, and nobody troubles about it!

"So I think I've been pretty well punished—richly as I've deserved to!"

"Trilby, have you ever been confirmed?"

"I forget. I fancy not!"

"Oh, dear; oh, dear! And do you know about our blessed Saviour, and the Atonement and the Incarnation and the Resurrection . . .?"

"Oh, yes—I *used* to, at least. I used to have to learn the Catechism on Sundays—mamma made me. Whatever her faults and mistakes were, poor mamma was always very particular about *that!* It all seemed very complicated. But papa told me not to bother too much about it, but to be good. He said that God would make it all right for us somehow, in the end—all of us. And that seems sensible, *doesn't* it?

"He told me to be good and not to mind what priests and clergymen tell us. He'd been a clergyman himself, and knew all about it, he said.

(*Continued on page 152*)

# A colonel who isn't crusty

Did you read that letter about "Crusty Colonels" recently published in the press. It gave three reasons why Colonels are more irritable than the rest of mankind. We are delighted to be able to publish another letter on this subject written by a Colonel (retired), who is *not* crusty—*and giving an excellent reason why.* He has found, as all Colonels can—and everyone else as well—that the remedy for crustiness lies in nothing more or less than the little daily dose of Kruschen. Read his letter—try Kruschen yourself, and see if he isn't right!

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*"Yours truly,*
*"C. H., Colonel (Retired)."*

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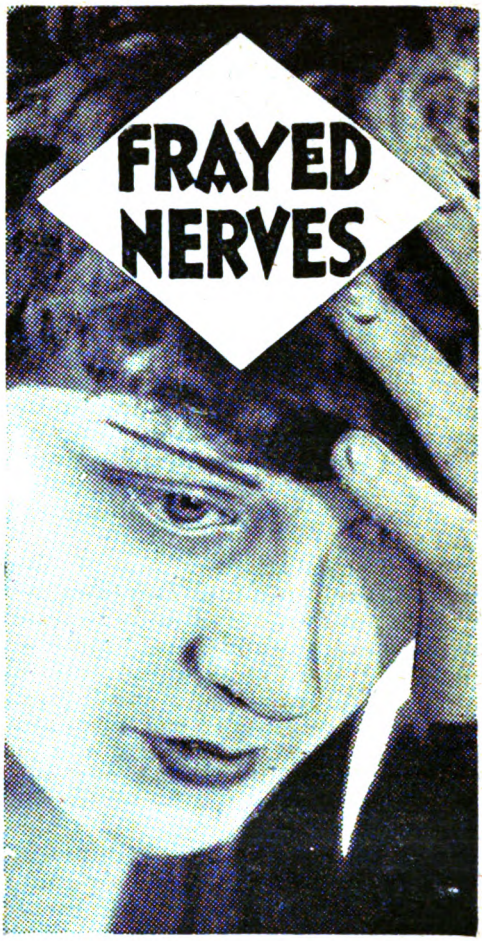


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"I haven't been very good—there's not much doubt about that, I'm afraid! But God knows I've repented often enough and sore enough; I do now! But I'm rather glad to die, I think; and not a bit afraid—not a scrap! I believe in poor papa, though he *was* so unfortunate! He was the cleverest man I ever knew, and the best—except Taffy and the Laird and your dear son!

"There'll be no hell for any of us—he told me so—except what we make for ourselves and each other down here; and that's bad enough for anything. He told me that *he* was responsible for me—he often said so—and that mamma was, too, and his parents for *him*, and his grandfathers and grandmothers for *them*, and so on up to Noah and ever so far beyond, and God for us all!

"He told me always to think of other people before myself; as Taffy does, and your son; and never to tell lies or be afraid, and keep away from drink, and I should be all right. But I've sometimes been all wrong, all the same; and it wasn't papa's fault, but poor mamma's and mine; and I've known it and been miserable at the time, and after, and I'm sure to be forgiven—perfectly certain—and so will everybody else, even the wickedest that ever lived! Why, just give them sense enough in the next world to understand all their wickedness in this, and that'll punish them enough for anything, I think! That's simple enough, *isn't* it? Besides, there may be *no* next world—that's on the cards, too, you know!—and that will be simpler still!

"Not all the clergymen in all the world, not even the Pope of Rome, will ever make me doubt papa or believe in any punishment after what we've all got to go through here. *Ce serait trop bête!*

"So that if you don't want me to very much, and he won't think it unkind, I'd rather not talk to Mr. Thomas Bagot about it. I'd rather talk to Taffy if I *must*. He's very clever, Taffy, though he doesn't often say such clever things as your son does, or paint nearly so well; and I'm sure he'll think papa was right."

And as a matter of fact the good Taffy, in his opinion on this solemn subject, was found to be at one with the late Reverend Patrick Michael O'Ferrall—and so was the Laird—and so (to his mother's shocked and pained surprise) was Little Billee.

And so were Sir Oliver Calthorpe and Sir Jakes (then Mr.) Talboys and Doctor Thorne and Antony and Lorrimer and the Greek!

And so—in after years, when grief had well pierced and torn and riddled her through and through, and time and age had healed the wounds, and nothing remained but the consciousness of great inward scars of recollection to remind her how deep and jagged and wide the wounds had once been—did Mrs. Bagot herself!

(*To be continued in next month's "Argosy."*)

# *A Long Tale*

A KING kept a man to tell him fables and tales at night before going o sleep. And one night the King, troubled with anxious thoughts, could not sleep, and the man told him three tales more than on other nights. And the King bade him tell still more, but he was unwilling, having told many. And the King said: "Thou hast told many, but they were short; tell me a long one, and then thou canst hie thee to bed." The man, agreeing, began thus: "A countryman had a thousand shillings, and went to the fair and bought two thousand sheep at sixpence each, and on his way back he found the water had risen in the river, and that he could not cross by either bridge or ford; but he found a little boat, and putting in two sheep, rowed across. And now, the river is wide, the boat very small, and the sheep many; when the rustic has ferried his flock across, I will go on with the tale." And he got up and hied him to bed.

"*Libro de los Exemplos*" (*Fifteenth Century*).

Little Billee's. Also his own, for he was charmed with her. He saw her three times in the course of the week, but could not say for certain what was the matter with her, beyond taking the very gravest view of her condition. For all he could advise or prescribe, her weakness and physical prostration increased rapidly, through no cause he could discover. Her insanity was not enough to account for it. She lost weight daily; she seemed to be wasting and fading away from sheer general atrophy.

Two or three times he took her and Marta for a drive.

On one of these occasions, as they went down Charlotte Street, she saw a shop with transparent French blinds in the window, and through them some Frenchwomen, with neat white caps, ironing. It was a French *blanchisserie de fin*, and the sight of it interested and excited her so much that she must needs insist on being put down and on going into it.

"Je voudrais bien parler à la patronne, si ça ne la dérange pas," she said.

The *patronne*, a genial Parisian, was much astonished to hear a great French lady, in costly garments, evidently a person of fashion and importance, applying to her rather humbly for employment in the business, and showing a thorough knowledge of the work (and of the Parisian workwoman's colloquial dialect). Marta managed to catch the *patronne's* eye, and tapped her forehead significantly, and Sir Oliver nodded. So the good woman humoured the great lady's fancy, and promised her abundance of employment whenever she should want it.

Employment! Poor Trilby was hardly strong enough to walk back to the carriage; and this was her last outing.

But this little adventure had filled her with hope and good spirits—for she had as yet received no answer from Angèle Boisse (who was in Marseilles), and had begun to realise how dreary the Quartier Latin would be without Jeannot, without Angèle, without the *trois Angliches* in the Place St. Anatole des Arts.

She was not allowed to see any of the strangers who came and made kind inquiries. This her doctors had strictly forbidden. Any reference to music or singing irritated her beyond measure. She would say to Marta, in bad German:

"Tell them, Marta—what nonsense it is! They are taking me for another—they are mad. They are trying to make a fool of me!"

And Marta would betray great uneasiness—almost terror—when she was appealed to in this way.

Svengali had died from heart disease. The cut he had received from Gecko had not apparently (as far as the verdict of a coroner's inquest could be trusted) had any effect in aggravating his malady or hastening his death.

But Gecko was sent for trial at the Old Bailey, and sentenced to hard labour for six months (a sentence which, if I remember aright, gave rise to much comment at the time). Taffy saw him again, but with no better result than before. He chose to preserve an obstinate silence on his relations with the Svengalis and their relations with each other.

When he was told how hopelessly ill and insane Madame Svengali was, he shed a few tears, and said: "Ah, pauvrette, pauvrette—ah, monsieur!—je l'aimais tant, je l'aimais tant! il n'y en a pas beaucoup comme elle, Dieu de misère! C'est un ange du Paradis!"

And not another word was to be got out of him.

It took some time to settle Svengali's affairs after his death. No will was found. His old mother came over from Germany, and two of his sisters, but no wife. The comic wife and the three children, and the sweet-stuff shop in Elberfeld had been humorous inventions of his own—a kind of Mrs. Harris!

He left three thousand pounds, every penny of which (and of far larger sums that he had spent) had been earned by "La Svengali," but nothing came to Trilby of this; nothing but the clothes and jewels he had given her, and in this respect he had been lavish enough; and there were countless costly gifts from emperors, kings, great people of all kinds. Trilby was under the impression that all these belonged to Marta. Marta behaved admirably; she seemed bound hand and foot to Trilby by a kind of slavish adoration, as that of a plain old mother for a brilliant and beautiful but dying child.

It soon became evident that, whatever her disease might be, Trilby had but a very short time to live.

She was soon too weak even to be taken out in a bath-chair, and remained all day in her large sitting-room with Marta; and

there, to her great and only joy, she received her three old friends every afternoon, and gave them coffee and made them smoke cigarettes of caporal as of old; and their hearts were daily harrowed as they watched her rapid decline.

Day by day she grew more beautiful in their eyes, in spite of her increasing pallor and emaciation—her skin was so pure and white and delicate, and the bones of her face so admirable!

Her eyes recovered all their old humorous brightness when *les trois Angliches* were with her, and the expression of her face was so wistful and tender for all her playfulness, so full of eager clinging to existence and to them, that they felt the memory of it would haunt them for ever, and be the sweetest and saddest memory of their lives.

Her quick, though feeble gestures, full of reminiscences of the vigorous and lively girl they had known a few years back, sent waves of pity through them and pure brotherly love; and the incomparable tones and changes and modulations of her voice, as she chatted and laughed, bewitched them almost as much as when she had sung the "Nussbaum" of Schumann in the Salle des Bashibazoucks.

Sometimes Lorrimer came, and Antony, and the Greek. It was like a genial little court of bohemia. And Lorrimer, Antony, the Laird, and Little Billee made those beautiful chalk and pencil studies of her head which are now so well known—all so singularly like her, and so singularly unlike each other! *Trilby vue á travers quatre tempéraments!*

These afternoons were probably the happiest poor Trilby had ever spent in her life—with these dear people round her, speaking the language she loved; talking of old times and jolly Paris days, she never thought of the morrow.

But later—at night, in the small hours—she would wake up with a start from some dream full of tender and blissful recollection, and suddenly realise her own mischance, and feel the icy hand of that which was to come before many morrows were over; and taste the bitterness of death so keenly that she longed to scream out loud and get up and walk up and down and wring her hands at the dreadful thought of parting for ever!

But she lay motionless and mum as a poor little frightened mouse in a trap, for fear of waking up the good old tired Marta, who was snoring at her side.

And in an hour or two the bitterness would pass away, the creeps and the horrors; and the stoical spirit of resignation would steal over her—the balm, the blessed calm, and all her old bravery would come back.

And then she would sink into sleep again, and dream more blissfully than ever, till the good Marta woke her with a motherly kiss and a fragrant cup of coffee; and she would find, feeble as she was, and doomed as she felt herself to be, that joy cometh of a morning; and life was still sweet for her, with yet a whole day to look forward to.

¶

ONE day she was deeply moved at receiving a visit from Mrs. Bagot, who, at Little Billee's earnest desire, had come all the way from Devonshire to see her.

As the graceful little lady came in, pale and trembling all over, Trilby rose from her chair to receive her, and rather timidly put out her hand, and smiled in a frightened manner. Neither could speak for a second. Mrs. Bagot stood stock-still by the door, gazing (with all her heart in her eyes) at the so terribly altered Trilby—the girl she had once so dreaded.

Trilby, who seemed also bereft of motion, and whose face and lips were ashen, exclaimed: "I'm afraid I haven't quite kept my promise to you, after all, but things have turned out so differently. Anyhow, you needn't have any fear of me *now*."

At the mere sound of that voice Mrs. Bagot, who was as impulsive, emotional and unregulated as her son, rushed forward, crying: "Oh, my poor girl, my poor girl!" and caught her in her arms and kissed and caressed her, and burst into a flood of tears, and forced her back into her chair, hugging her as if she were a long-lost child.

"I love you now as much as I always admired you—pray believe it!"

"Oh, how kind of you to say that!" said Trilby, her own eyes filling. "I'm not at all the dangerous or designing person you thought. I knew quite well I wasn't a proper person to marry your son all the time, and told him so again and again. It was very stupid of me to say yes at last. I was miserable directly after, I assure you. Somehow I couldn't help myself—I was driven."

"Oh, don't talk of that! Don't talk of that! You've never been to blame in any way—I've long known it—I've been full of remorse! You've been in my thoughts always, night and day. Forgive a poor jealous mother. As if *any* man could help loving you—or any woman either. Forgive me!"

"Oh, Mrs. Bagot—forgive *you!* What a funny idea! But, anyhow, you have forgiven *me*, and that's all I care for now. I was very fond of your son—as fond as could be. I am now, but in quite a different sort of way, you know—the sort of way *you* must be, I fancy! There was never another like him that I ever met—anywhere! You *must* be so proud of him; who wouldn't? *Nobody's* good enough for him. I would have been only too glad to be his servant, his humble servant! I used to tell him so—but he wouldn't hear of it—he was much too kind! He always thought of others before himself. And, oh, how rich and famous he's become! I've heard all about it, and it did me good. It does me more good to think of than anything else; far more than if I were to be ever so rich and famous myself, I can tell you!"

This from La Svengali, whose overpowering fame, so utterly forgotten by herself, was still ringing all over Europe; whose lamentable illness and approaching death were being mourned and discussed and commented upon in every capital of the civilised world, as one distressing bulletin appeared after another. She might have been a royal personage!

Mrs. Bagot knew, of course, the strange form her insanity had taken, and made no allusion to the flood of thoughts that rushed through her own brain as she listened to this towering goddess of song, this poor mad queen of the nightingales, humbly gloating over her son's success. . . .

Poor Mrs. Bagot had just come from Little Billee's, in Fitzroy Square, close by. There she had seen Taffy, in a corner of Little Billee's studio, laboriously answering endless letters and telegrams from all parts of Europe—for the good Taffy had constituted himself Trilby's secretary and *homme d'affaires*—unknown to her, of course. And this was no sinecure (though he liked it); putting aside the numerous people he had to see and be interviewed by, there were kind inquiries and messages of condolence and sympathy from nearly all the crowned heads of Europe, through their chamberlains; applications for help from unsuccessful musical strugglers all over the world to the pre-eminently successful one; beautiful letters from great and famous people, musical and otherwise; disinterested offers of service; interested proposals for engagements when the present trouble should be over; beggings for an interview from famous *impresarios*, to obtain which no distance would be thought too great, etc., etc., etc. It was endless, in English, French, German, Italian—in languages quite incomprehensible (many letters had to remain unanswered)—Taffy took an almost malicious pleasure in explaining all this to Mrs. Bagot.

Then there was a constant rolling of carriages up to the door and a thundering of Little Billee's knocker: Lord and Lady Palmerston wish to know—the Lord Chief Justice wishes to know—the Dean of Westminster wishes to know—the Marchioness of Westminster wishes to know—everybody wishes to know if there

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is any better news regarding Madame Svengali!

These were small things, truly; but Mrs. Bagot was a small person from a small village in Devonshire, and one whose heart and eye had hitherto been filled by no larger image than that of Little Billee; and Little Billee's fame, as she now discovered for the first time, did not quite fill the entire universe.

And she mustn't be too much blamed if all these obvious signs of a world-wide colossal celebrity impressed and even awed her a little.

Madame Svengali! Why, this was the beautiful girl whom she remembered so well, whom she had so grandly discarded with a word, and who had accepted her *congé* so meekly in a minute; whom, indeed, she had been cursing in her heart for years because—because what?

Poor Mrs. Bagot felt herself turn hot and red all over and humbled herself to the very dust, and almost forgot that she had been in the right, after all, and that "la grande Trilby" was certainly no fit match for her son!

So she went quite humbly to see Trilby, and found a poor pathetic mad creature still more humble than herself, who still apologised for—for what?

A poor, pathetic, mad creature who had clean forgotten that she was the greatest singer in all the world—one of the greatest artists that had ever lived; but who remembered with shame and contrition that she had once taken the liberty of yielding (after endless pressure and repeated disinterested refusals of her own, and out of sheer irresistible affection) to the passionate pleadings of a little obscure art student, a mere boy—no better off than herself—just as penniless and insignificant a nobody; but—the son of Mrs. Bagot.

All due sense of proportion died out of the poor lady as she remembered and realised all this!

And then Trilby's pathetic beauty, so touching, so winning, in its rapid decay; the nameless charm of look and voice and manner that was her special appanage, and which her malady and singular madness had only increased; her childlike simplicity, her transparent forgetfulness of self—all these so fascinated and entranced Mrs. Bagot, whose quick susceptibility to such impressions was just as keen as her son's, that she very soon found herself all but worshipping this fast-fading lily—for so she called her in her own mind—quite forgetting (or affecting to forget) on what very questionable soil the lily had been reared, and through what strange vicissitudes of evil and corruption it had managed to grow so tall and white and fragrant!

Oh, strange compelling power of weakness and grace and prettiness combined, and sweet, sincere unconscious natural manners, not to speak of world-wide fame!

For Mrs. Bagot was just a shrewd little conventional British country matron of the good upper middle-class type, bristling all over with provincial properties and respectabilities, a philistine of the philistines, in spite of her artistic instincts; one who for years had (rather unjustly) thought of Trilby as a wanton and perilous siren, an unchaste and unprincipled and most dangerous daughter of Heth.

And here she was—like all the rest of us monads and nomads and bohemians—just sitting at Trilby's feet. . . . "A washerwoman! A figure model! And Heaven knows what besides!" and she had never heard her sing!

It was truly comical to see and hear!

¶

MRS. Bagot did not go back to Devonshire. She remained in Fitzroy Square, at her son's, and spent most of her time with Trilby, doing and devising all kinds of things to distract and amuse her and lead her thoughts gently to heaven, and soften for her the coming end of all.

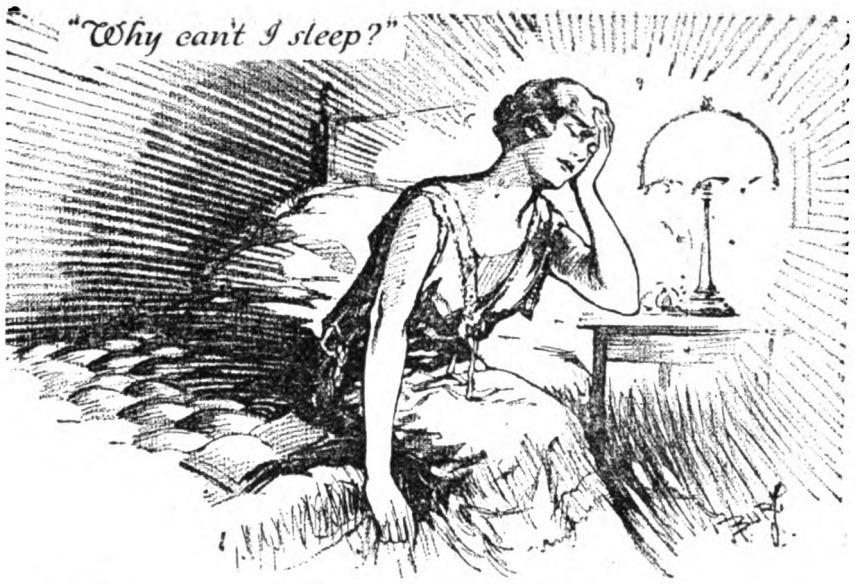
Trilby had a way of saying, and especially of looking, "Thank you," that made one wish to do as many things for her as one could, if only to make her say and look it again.

And she had retained much of her old, quaint and amusing manner of telling things, and had much to tell still left of her wandering life, although there were so many strange lapses in her powers of memory—gaps—which, if they could only have been filled up, would have been full of such surpassing interest!

Then she was never tired of talking and hearing of Little Billee; and that was a subject of which Mrs. Bagot could never tire either!

Then there were the recollections of her childhood. One day, in a drawer, Mrs.

(Continued on page 146.)

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Bagot came upon a faded daguerreotype of a woman in a Tam o' Shanter, with a face so sweet and beautiful and saintlike that it almost took her breath away. It was Trilby's mother.

"Who and what was your mother, Trilby?"

"Ah, poor mamma!" said Trilby, and she looked at the portrait a long time. "Ah, she was ever so much prettier than that! Mamma was once a *demoiselle de comptoir*—that's a barmaid, you know—at the Montagnards Ecossais, in the Rue du Poissonnière—a place where men used to drink and smoke without sitting down. That was unfortunate, wasn't it?

"Papa loved her with all his heart, although, of course, she wasn't his equal. They were married at the Embassy, in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré.

"*Her* parents weren't married at all. Her mother was the daughter of a boatman on Loch Ness, near a place called Drumnadrochit; but her father was the Honourable Colonel Desmond. He was related to all sorts of great people in England and Ireland. He behaved very badly to my grandmother and to poor mamma—his own daughter, deserted them both! Not very *honourable* of him, *was* it? And that's all I know about him."

And then she went on to tell of the home in Paris that might have been so happy but for her father's passion for drink; of her parents' deaths, and little Jeannot, and so forth. And Mrs. Bagot was much moved and interested by these naive revelations, which accounted in a measure for so much that seemed unaccountable in this extraordinary woman; who thus turned out to be a kind of cousin (though on the wrong side of the blanket) to no less a person than the famous Duchess of Towers.

With what joy would that ever kind and gracious lady have taken poor Trilby to her bosom had she only known! She had once been all the way from Paris to Vienna merely to hear her sing. But, unfortunately, the Svengalis had just then left for St. Petersburg, and so she had her long journey for nothing!

Mrs. Bagot brought her many good books and read them to her—Dr. Cummings on the approaching end of the world, and other works of a like comforting tendency for those who are just about to leave it; the *Pilgrim's Progress*, sweet little tracts, and what not.

Trilby was so grateful that she listened with much patient attention. Only now and then a faint gleam of amusement would steal over her face, and her lips would almost form themselves to ejaculate: "Oh, maïe, aïe!"

Then Mrs. Bagot, as a reward for such winning docility, would read her *David Copperfield*, and that was heavenly indeed!

But the best of all was for Trilby to look over John Leech's *Pictures of Life and Character*, just out. She had never seen any drawings of Leech before, except now and then in an occasional *Punch* that turned up in the studio in Paris. And they never palled upon her, and taught her more of the aspect of English life (the life she loved) than any book she had ever read. She laughed and laughed; and it was almost as sweet to listen to as if she were vocalising the quick part in Chopin's Impromptu.

One day she said, her lips trembling: "I can't make out why you're so wonderfully kind to me, Mrs. Bagot. I hope you have not forgotten who and what I am, and what my story is. I hope you haven't forgotten that I'm not a respectable woman?"

"Oh, my dear child—don't ask me. . . . I only know that you are you! . . . and I am I, and that is enough for me . . . you're my poor, gentle, patient, suffering daughter, whatever else you are—more sinned against than sinning, I feel sure! But there . . . I've misjudged you so, and been so unjust, that I would give worlds to make you some amends . . . besides, I should be just as fond of you if you'd committed a murder, I really believe—you're so strange, you're irresistible! Did you ever, in all your life, meet anybody that *wasn't* fond of you?"

Trilby's eyes moistened with tender pleasure at such a pretty compliment. Then after a few minutes' thought she said, with engaging candour: "No, I can't say I ever did, that I can think of just now. But I've forgotten such lots of people!"

¶

ONE day Mrs. Bagot told Trilby that her brother-in-law, Mr. Thomas Bagot, would much like to come and talk to her.

"Was that the gentleman who came with you to the studio in Paris?"

"Yes."

"Why, he's a clergyman, isn't he? What does he want to come and talk to *me* about?"

(*Continued on page 148*)

# Which do you prefer?

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" Ah, my dear child . . . ! " said Mrs. Bagot, her eyes filling.

Trilby was thoughtful for a while, and then said : " I'm going to die, I suppose. Oh, yes, oh, yes ! There's no mistake about that ! "

" Dear Trilby, we are all in the hands of an Almighty Merciful God ! " And the tears rolled down Mrs. Bagot's cheeks.

After a long pause, during which she gazed out of the window, Trilby said, in an abstracted kind of way, as though she were talking to herself : " Après tout, c'est pas déjà si raide, de claquer ! J'en ai tant vus, qui ont passé par la ! Au bout du fossé la culbute, ma foi ! "

" What are you saying to yourself in French, Trilby ? Your French is so difficult to understand ! "

" Oh, I beg your pardon ! I was thinking it's not so difficult to die, after all ! I've seen such lots of people do it. I've nursed them, you know—papa and mamma and Jeannot, and Angèle Boisse's mother-in-law, and a poor *casseur de pierres*, Colin Maigret, who lived in the Impasse des Taupes St. Germain. He'd been run over by an omnibus in the Rue Vaugirard, and had to have both his legs cut off just above the knee. They none of them seemed to mind dying a bit. They weren't a bit afraid ! *I'm* not !

" Poor people don't think much of death. Rich people shouldn't, either. They should be taught when they're quite young to laugh at it and despise it, like the Chinese. The Chinese die of laughing just as their heads are being cut off, and cheat the executioner ! It's all in the day's work, and we're all in the same boat—so who's afraid !"

" Dying is not all, my poor child ! Are you prepared to meet your Maker face to face ? Have you ever thought about God and the possible wrath to come if you should die unrepentant ? "

" Oh, but I shan't ! I've been repenting all my life ! Besides, there'll be no wrath for any of us—not even the worst ! *Il y aura amnistie générale !* Papa told me so, and he'd been a clergyman, like Mr. Thomas Bagot. I often think about God. I'm very fond of Him. One *must* have something perfect to look up to and be fond of—even if it's only an idea, even if it's too good to be true !

" Though some people don't even believe He exists ! Le père Martin didn't—but, of course, *he* was only a *chiffonnier*, and doesn't count.

" One day, though, Durien, the sculptor, who's very clever, and a very good fellow indeed, said :

" ' Vois-tu, Trilby—I'm very much afraid He doesn't really exist, le bon Dieu ! Most unfortunately for *me*, for I *adore* Him ! I never do a piece of work without thinking how nice it would be if I could only please *Him* with it ! '

" And I've often thought, myself, how heavenly it must be to be able to paint, or sculpt, or make music, or write beautiful poetry, for that very reason !

" Why, once on a very hot afternoon we were sitting, a lot of us, in the courtyard outside la mère Martin's shop, drinking coffee with an old Invalide called Bastide Lendormi, one of the Vieille Garde, who'd only got one leg and one arm and one eye, and everybody was very fond of him. Well, a model called Mimi la Salope came out of the Mont-de-piété opposite, and Père Martin called out to her to come and sit down, and gave her a cup of coffee, and asked her to sing.

" She sang a song of Béranger's, about Napoleon the Great, in which it says :

" ' Parlez-nous de lui, grandmère !
Grandmère, parlez-nous de lui ! '

I suppose she sang it very well, for it made old Bastide Lendormi cry ; and when Père Martin *blagué'd* him about it, he said :

" ' C'est égal, voyez-vous ! to sing like that is *to pray !* '

" And then I thought how lovely it would be if *I* could only sing like Mimi la Salope, and I've thought so ever since—just to *pray !* "

" *What*, Trilby ? If *you* could only sing like—— Oh, but never mind ; I forgot ! Tell me, Trilby—do you ever pray to Him, as other people pray ? "

" Pray to Him ? Well, no—not often—not in words and on my knees and with my hands together, you know ! *Thinking's* praying, very often—don't you think so ? And so's being sorry and ashamed when one's done a mean thing, and glad when one's resisted a temptation, and grateful when it's a fine day and one's enjoying one's self without hurting anyone else ! What is it but praying when you try and bear up after losing all you cared to live for ? And very good praying, too ! There can be prayers without words just as well as songs,

(*Continued on page* 150)

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I suppose; and Svengali used to say that songs without words are the best!

"And then it seems mean to be always asking for things. Besides, you don't get them any the faster that way, and that shows!

"La mère Martin used to be always praying. And Père Martin used always to laugh at her; yet he always seemed to get the things *he* wanted oftenest!

"*I* prayed once, very hard indeed! I prayed for Jeannot not to die!"

"Well—but how do you *repent*, Trilby, if you do not humble yourself and pray for forgiveness on your knees?"

"Oh, well—I don't exactly know! Look here, Mrs. Bagot, I'll tell you the lowest and meanest thing I ever did. . . ."

(Mrs. Bagot felt a little nervous.)

"I'd promised to take Jeannot on Palm Sunday to St. Philippe du Roule, to hear l'abbé Bergamot. But Durien (that's the sculptor, you know) asked me to go with him to St. Germain, where there was a fair or something; and with Mathieu, who was a student in law; and a certain Victorine Letellier, who—who was Mathieu's mistress, in fact—a lace-mender in the Rue Ste. Maritorne la Pocharde. And so I went on Sunday morning to tell Jeannot that I couldn't take him.

"He cried so dreadfully that I thought I'd give up the others and take him to St. Philippe, as I'd promised. But then Durien and Mathieu and Victorine drove up and waited outside, and so I *didn't* take him, and went with them, and I didn't enjoy anything all day, and was miserable.

"They were in an open carriage with two horses; it was Mathieu's treat, and Jeannot might have ridden on the box by the coachman without being in anybody's way. But I was afraid they didn't want him, as they didn't say anything, and so I didn't dare ask—and Jeannot saw us drive away, and I *couldn't* look back! And the worst of it is that when we were half-way to St. Germain, Durien said: 'What a pity you didn't bring Jeannot!' and they were all sorry I hadn't.

"It was six or seven years ago, and I really believe I've thought of it every day, and sometimes in the middle of the night!

"Ah, and when Jeannot was dying, and when he was dead—the remembrance of that Palm Sunday!

"And if *that's* not repenting, I don't know what is!"

"Oh, Trilby, what nonsense! *That's* nothing; good heavens!—putting off a small child! I'm thinking of far worse things—when you were in the Quartier Latin, you know—sitting to painters and sculptors. . . . Surely, so attractive as you are. . . . ."

"Oh, yes. . . . I know what you mean—it was horrid, and I was frightfully ashamed of myself; and it wasn't amusing a bit; *nothing* was, till I met your son and Taffy and dear Sandy M'Allister! But then it wasn't deceiving or disappointing anybody, or hurting their feelings—it was only hurting myself!

"Besides, all that sort of thing, in women, is punished severely enough down here, God knows, unless one's a Russian empress, like Catherine the Great, or a grande dame like lots of them, or a great genius like Madame Rachael or George Sand!

"Why, if it hadn't been for that, and sitting for the figure, I should have felt myself good enough to marry your son, *although* I was only a *blanchisseuse de fin*—you've said so yourself!

"And I should have made him a good wife—of that I feel sure. He wanted to live all his life at Barbizon, and paint, you know; and didn't care for society in the least. Anyhow, I should have been equal to such a life as that! Lots of their wives are *blanchisseuses* over there, or people of that sort; and they get on very well indeed, and nobody troubles about it!

"So I think I've been pretty well punished—richly as I've deserved to!"

"Trilby, have you ever been confirmed?"

"I forget. I fancy not!"

"Oh, dear; oh, dear! And do you know about our blessed Saviour, and the Atonement and the Incarnation and the Resurrection . . .?"

"Oh, yes—I *used* to, at least. I used to have to learn the Catechism on Sundays—mamma made me. Whatever her faults and mistakes were, poor mamma was always very particular about *that!* It all seemed very complicated. But papa told me not to bother too much about it, but to be good. He said that God would make it all right for us somehow, in the end—all of us. And that seems sensible, *doesn't* it?

"He told me to be good and not to mind what priests and clergymen tell us. He'd been a clergyman himself, and knew all about it, he said.

(*Continued on page 152*)

# A colonel who isn't crusty

Did you read that letter about "Crusty Colonels" recently published in the press. It gave three reasons why Colonels are more irritable than the rest of mankind. We are delighted to be able to publish another letter on this subject written by a Colonel (retired), who is *not* crusty—*and giving an excellent reason why.* He has found, as all Colonels can—and everyone else as well—that the remedy for crustiness lies in nothing more or less than the little daily dose of Kruschen. Read his letter—try Kruschen yourself, and see if he isn't right!

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*"I myself am a retired Colonel—but I am not Crusty. I avoid the trouble by taking the advice of the Kruschen Salts Company.*

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*"No more crustiness then.*

*"Yours truly,*
*"C. H., Colonel (Retired)."*

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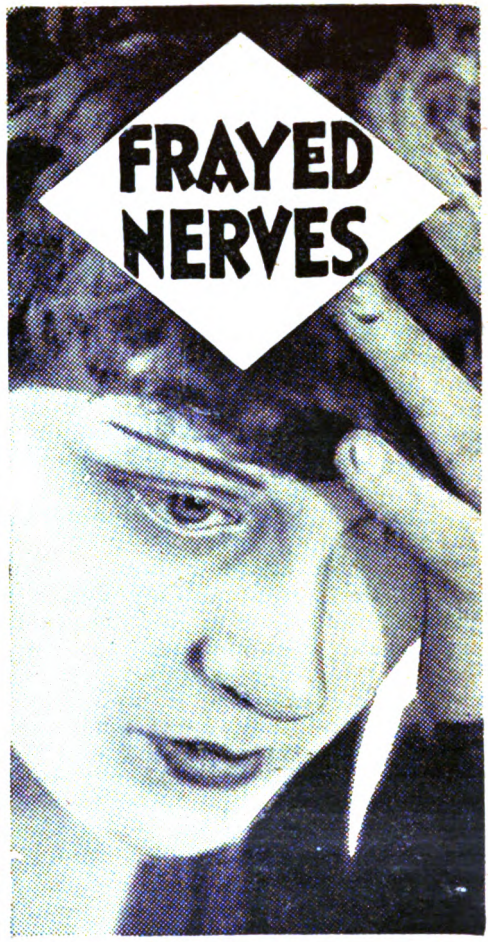


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" I haven't been very good—there's not much doubt about that, I'm afraid! But God knows I've repented often enough and sore enough; I do now! But I'm rather glad to die, I think; and not a bit afraid—not a scrap! I believe in poor papa, though he *was* so unfortunate! He was the cleverest man I ever knew, and the best—except Taffy and the Laird and your dear son!

" There'll be no hell for any of us—he told me so—except what we make for ourselves and each other down here; and that's bad enough for anything. He told me that *he* was responsible for me—he often said so—and that mamma was, too, and his parents for *him*, and his grandfathers and grandmothers for *them*, and so on up to Noah and ever so far beyond, and God for us all!

" He told me always to think of other people before myself; as Taffy does, and your son; and never to tell lies or be afraid, and keep away from drink, and I should be all right. But I've sometimes been all wrong, all the same; and it wasn't papa's fault, but poor mamma's and mine; and I've known it and been miserable at the time, and after, and I'm sure to be forgiven—perfectly certain—and so will everybody else, even the wickedest that ever lived! Why, just give them sense enough in the next world to understand all their wickedness in this, and that'll punish them enough for anything, I think! That's simple enough, *isn't* it? Besides, there may be *no* next world—that's on the cards, too, you know!—and that will be simpler still!

" Not all the clergymen in all the world, not even the Pope of Rome, will ever make me doubt papa or believe in any punishment after what we've all got to go through here. *Ce serait trop bête!*

" So that if you don't want me to very much, and he won't think it unkind, I'd rather not talk to Mr. Thomas Bagot about it. I'd rather talk to Taffy if I *must*. He's very clever, Taffy, though he doesn't often say such clever things as your son does, or paint nearly so well; and I'm sure he'll think papa was right."

And as a matter of fact the good Taffy, in his opinion on this solemn subject, was found to be at one with the late Reverend Patrick Michael O'Ferrall—and so was the Laird—and so (to his mother's shocked and pained surprise) was Little Billee.

And so were Sir Oliver Calthorpe and Sir Jakes (then Mr.) Talboys and Doctor Thorne and Antony and Lorrimer and the Greek!

And so—in after years, when grief had well pierced and torn and riddled her through and through, and time and age had healed the wounds, and nothing remained but the consciousness of great inward scars of recollection to remind her how deep and jagged and wide the wounds had once been—did Mrs. Bagot herself!

(*To be continued in next month's "Argosy."*)

# *A Long Tale*

A KING kept a man to tell him fables and tales at night before going o sleep. And one night the King, troubled with anxious thoughts, could not sleep, and the man told him three tales more than on other nights. And the King bade him tell still more, but he was unwilling, having told many. And the King said: " Thou hast told many, but they were short; tell me a long one, and then thou canst hie thee to bed." The man, agreeing, began thus: " A countryman had a thousand shillings, and went to the fair and bought two thousand sheep at sixpence each, and on his way back he found the water had risen in the river, and that he could not cross by either bridge or ford; but he found a little boat, and putting in two sheep, rowed across. And now, the river is wide, the boat very small, and the sheep many; when the rustic has ferried his flock across, I will go on with the tale." And he got up and hied him to bed.

" *Libro de los Exemplos* " (*Fifteenth Century*).

The ARGOSY
The WORLD'S BEST STORIES

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# The Belled Buzzard

*"The guilty conscience fears, when there's no fear"*

By IRVIN S. COBB

THERE was a swamp known as Little Niggerwool, to distinguish it from Big Niggerwool, which lay across the river. It was traversable only by those who knew it well—an oblong stretch of tawny mud and tawny water, measuring maybe four miles its longest way and two miles roughly at its widest; and it was full of cypress and stunted swamp oak, with edgings of canebrake and rank weeds; and in one place, where a ridge crossed it from side to side, it was snaggled like an old jaw with dead tree trunks, rising close-ranked and thick as teeth. It was untenanted of living things—except, down below, there were snakes and mosquitoes, and a few wading and swimming fowl; and up above, those big woodpeckers that the country people called logcocks—larger than pigeons, with flaming crests and spiky tails—swooping in their long, loping flight from snag to snag, always just out of gunshot of the chance invader, and uttering a strident cry which matched those surroundings so fitly that it might well have been the voice of the swamp itself.

On one side Little Niggerwool drained its saffron waters off into a sluggish creek, where summer ducks bred, and on the other it ended abruptly at a natural bank of high ground, along which the county turnpike ran. The swamp came right up to the road and thrust its fringe of reedy, weedy undergrowth forward as though in challenge to the good farm lands that were spread beyond the barrier. At the time I am speaking of it was midsummer, and from these canes and weeds and waterplants there came a smell so rank as almost to be overpowering. They grew thick as a curtain, making a blank green wall taller than a man's head.

Along the dusty stretch of road fronting the swamp nothing living had stirred for half an hour or more. And so at length the weed-stems rustled and parted, and out from among them a man came forth silently and cautiously. He was an old man—an old man who had once been fat, but with age had grown lean again, so that now his skin was by odds too large for him. It lay on the back of his neck in folds. Under the chin he was pouched like a pelican and about the jowls was wattled like a turkey gobbler.

He came out upon the road slowly and stopped there, switching his legs absently with the stalk of a horseweed. He was in his shirtsleeves—a respectable, snuffy old figure, evidently a man deliberate in words and thoughts and actions. There was something about him suggestive of an old staid sheep that had been engaged in a clandestine transaction and was afraid of being found out.

He had made amply sure no one was in sight before he came out of the swamp, but now, to be doubly certain, he watched the empty road—first up, then down—for a long half minute, and fetched a sighing breath of satisfaction. His eyes fell upon his

feet, and, taken with an idea, he stepped back to the edge of the road and with a wisp of crabgrass wiped his shoes clean of the swamp mud, which was of a different colour and texture from the soil of the upland. All his life Squire H. B. Gathers had been a careful, canny man, and he had need to be doubly careful on this summer morning. Having disposed of the mud on his feet, he settled his white straw hat down firmly upon his head, and, crossing the road, he climbed a stake-and-rider fence laboriously and went plodding sedately across a weed-field and up a slight slope towards his house, half a mile away, upon the crest of the little hill.

He felt perfectly natural—not like a man who had just taken a fellowman's life—but natural and safe, and well satisfied with himself and with his morning's work. And he was safe; that was the main thing—absolutely safe. Without hitch or hindrance he had done the thing for which he had been planning and waiting and longing all these months. There had been no slip or mischance; the whole thing had worked out as plainly and simply as two and two make four. No living creature except himself knew of the meeting in the early morning at the head of Little Niggerwool, exactly where the squire had figured they should meet; none knew of the device by which the other man had been lured deeper and deeper in the swamp to the exact spot where the gun was hidden. No one had seen the two of them enter the swamp; no one had seen the squire emerge, three hours later, alone.

The gun, having served its purpose, was hidden again, in a place no mortal eye would ever discover. Face downward, with a hole between his shoulder blades, the dead man was lying where he might lie undiscovered for months or for years. His pedlar's pack was buried in the mud so deep that not even the probing crawfishes could find it. He would never be missed probably. There was but the slightest likelihood that inquiry would ever be made for him—let alone a search. He was a stranger and a foreigner, the dead man was, whose comings and goings made no great stir in the neighbourhood, and whose failure to come again would be taken as a matter of course—just one of those shiftless, wandering Dagoes, here to-day and gone to-morrow. That was one of the best things about it—these Dagoes never had any people in this country to worry about them or look for them when they disappeared. And so it was all over and done with, and nobody the wiser. The squire clapped his hands together briskly with the air of a man dismissing a subject from his mind for good, and mended his gait.

He felt no stabbings of conscience. On the contrary, a glow of gratification filled him. His house was saved from scandal; his present wife would philander no more—before his very eyes—with these young Dagoes, who came from nobody knew where, with packs on their backs and persuasive, wheedling tongues in their heads. At this thought the squire raised his head and considered his homestead. It looked good to him—the small white cottage among the honey locusts, with beehives and flower beds about it; the tidy, whitewashed fence; the sound outbuildings at the back, and the well-tilled acres round about.

At the fence he halted and turned about, carelessly and casually, and looked back along the way he had come. Everything was as it should be—the weedfield steaming in the heat; the empty road stretching along the crooked ridge like a long grey snake sunning itself; and beyond it, massing up, the dark, cloaking stretch of swamp. Everything was all right, but—— The squire's eyes, in their loose sacs of skin, narrowed and squinted. Out of the blue arch away over yonder a small black dot had resolved itself and was swinging to and fro, like a mote. A buzzard—hey? Well, there were always buzzards about on a clear day like this. Buzzards were nothing to worry about—almost any time you could see one buzzard or a dozen buzzards if you were a mind to look for them.

But this particular buzzard now—wasn't he making for Little Niggerwool? The squire did not like the idea of that. He had not thought of the buzzards until this minute. Sometimes when cattle strayed the owners had been known to follow the buzzards, knowing mighty well that if the buzzards led the way to where the stray was, the stray would be past the small salvage of hide and hoofs—but the owner's doubts would be set at rest for good and all.

There was a grain of disquiet in this. The squire shook his head to drive the thought away—yet it persisted, coming back like a midge dancing before his face. Once at home, however, Squire Gathers deported himself in a perfectly normal manner. With the satisfied proprietorial eye of an elderly

husband who has no rivals, he considered his young wife, busied about her household duties. He sat in an easy-chair upon his front gallery and read his yesterday's *Courier-Journal* which the rural carrier had brought him; but he kept stepping out into the yard to peer up into the sky and all about him. To the second Mrs. Gathers he explained that he was looking for weather signs. A day as hot and still as this one was a regular weather breeder; there ought to be rain before night.

"Maybe so," she said; "but looking's not going to bring rain."

Nevertheless the squire continued to look. There was really nothing to worry about; still at midday he did not eat much dinner, and before his wife was half through with hers he was back on the gallery. His paper was cast aside and he was watching. The original buzzard—or, anyhow, he judged it was the first one he had seen—was swinging back and forth in great pendulum swings, but closer down toward the swamp—closer and closer—until it looked from that distance as though the buzzard flew almost at the level of the tallest snags there. And on beyond this first buzzard, coursing above him, were other buzzards. Were there four of them? No; there were five—five in all.

Such is the way of the buzzard—that shifting black question mark which punctuates a Southern sky. In the woods a shoat or a sheep or a horse lies down to die. At once, coming seemingly out of nowhere, appears a black spot, up five hundred feet or a thousand in the air. In broad loops and swirls this dot swings round and round and round, coming a little closer to earth at every turn and always with one particular spot upon the earth for the axis of its wheel. Out of space also other moving spots emerge and grow larger as they tack and jibe and drop nearer, coming in their leisurely buzzard way to the feast. There is no haste—the feast will wait. If it is a dumb creature that has fallen stricken the grim coursers will sooner or later be assembled about it and alongside it, scrouging ever closer and closer to the dying thing, with awkward outthrustings of their naked necks and great dust-raising flaps of the huge, unkempt wings; lifting their feathered shanks high and stiffly like old crippled gravediggers in overalls that are too tight—but silent and patient all, offering no attack until the last tremor runs through the stiffening carcass and the eyes glaze over. To humans the buzzard pays a deeper meed of respect—he hangs aloft longer; but in the end he comes. No scavenger shark, no carrion crab, ever chambered more grisly secrets in his digestive processes than this big charnel bird. Such is the way of the buzzard.

¶

THE squire missed his afternoon nap, a thing that had not happened in years. He stayed on the front gallery and kept count. Those moving distant black specks typified uneasiness for the squire—not fear exactly, or panic or anything akin to it, but a nibbling, nagging kind of uneasiness. Time and again he said to himself that he would not think about them any more; but he did—unceasingly.

By supper time there were seven of them.

He slept light and slept badly. It was not the thought of that dead man lying yonder in Little Niggerwool that made him toss and fume while his wife snored gently alongside him. It was something else altogether. Finally his stirrings roused her and she asked him drowsily what ailed him. Was he sick? Or bothered about anything?

Irritated, he answered her snappishly. Certainly nothing was bothering him, he told her. It was a hot enough night—wasn't it? And when a man got a little along in life he was apt to be a light sleeper—wasn't that so? Well, then? She turned upon her side and slept again with her light, purring snore. The squire lay awake, thinking hard and waiting for day to come.

At the first pin-and-grey glow he was up and out upon the gallery. He cut a comic figure standing there in his shirt in the half-light, with the dewlap at his throat dangling grotesquely in the neck opening of the unbuttoned garment, and his bare bowed legs showing, splotched and varicose. He kept his eyes fixed on the skyline below, to the south. Buzzards are early risers, too. Presently, as the heavens shimmered with the miracle of sunrise, he could make them out—six or seven, or maybe eight.

An hour after breakfast the squire was on his way down through the weedfield to the county road. He went half eagerly, half unwillingly. He wanted to make sure about those buzzards. It might be that they were aiming for the old pasture at the head of the swamp. There were sheep grazing there—and it might be that a sheep had died.

Buzzards were notoriously fond of sheep, when dead. Or, if they were pointed for the swamp, he must satisfy himself exactly what part of the swamp it was. He was at the stake-and-rider fence when a mare came jogging down the road, drawing a rig with a man in it. At sight of the squire in the field the man pulled up.

"Hi, Squire!" he saluted. "Goin' somewheres?"

"No; jest knockin' about," the squire said—"jest sorter lookin' the place over."

"Hot agin—ain't it?" said the other.

The squire allowed that it was, for a fact, mighty hot. Commonplaces of gossip followed this—county politics and a neighbour's wife sick of breakbone fever down the road a piece. The subject of crops succeeded inevitably. The squire spoke of the need of rain. Instantly he regretted it, for the other man, who was by way of being a weather wiseacre, cocked his head aloft to study the sky for any signs of clouds.

"Wonder whut all them buzzards are doin' yonder, Squire," he said, pointing upward with his whipstock.

"Whut buzzards—where?" asked the squire with an elaborate note of carelessness in his voice.

"Right yonder, over Little Niggerwool—see 'em there?"

"Oh, yes," the squire made answer. "Now I see 'em. They ain't doin' nothin', I reckin—jest flyin' round same as they always do in clear weather."

"Must be somethin' dead over there!" speculated the man in the buggy.

"A hawg, probably," said the squire promptly—almost too promptly. "There's likely to be hawgs usin' in Niggerwool. Bristow, over on the other side from here—he's got a big drove of hawgs."

"Well, mebbe so," said the man; "but hawgs is a heap more apt to be feedin' on high ground, seems like to me. Well, I'll be gittin' along towards town. G'day, Squire." And he slapped the lines down on the mare's flank and jogged off through the dust.

He could not have suspected anything—that man couldn't. As the squire turned away from the road and headed for his house he congratulated himself upon that stroke of his in bringing in Bristow's hogs; and yet there remained this disquieting note in the situation, that buzzards flying, and especially buzzards flying over Little Niggerwool, made people curious—made them ask questions.

He was half way across the weedfield when, above the hum of insect life, above the inward clamour of his own busy speculations, there came to his ear dimly and distantly a sound that made him halt and cant his head to one side the better to hear it. Somewhere, a good way off, there was a thin, thready, broken strain of metallic clinking and clanking—an eery ghost-chime ringing. It came nearer and became plainer—tonk-tonk-tonk; then the tonks all running together briskly.

A sheep bell or a cowbell—that was it; but why did it seem to come from overhead, from up in the sky, like? And why did it shift so abruptly from one quarter to another—from left to right and back again to left? And how was it that the clapper seemed to strike so fast? Not even the breachiest of breachy young heifers could be expected to tinkle a cowbell with such briskness. The squire's eye searched the earth and the sky, his troubled mind giving to his eye a quick and flashing scrutiny. He had it. It was not a cow at all. It was not anything that went on four legs.

One of the loathly flock had left the others. The orbit of his swing had carried him across the road and over Squire Gathers' land. He was sailing right toward and over the squire now. Craning his flabby neck, the squire could make out the unwholesome contour of the huge bird. He could see the ragged black wings—a buzzard's wings are so often ragged and uneven—and the naked throat; the slim, naked head; the big feet folded up against the dingy belly. And he could see a bell, too—an undersized cowbell—that dangled at the creature's breast and jangled incessantly. All his life nearly Squire Gathers had been hearing about the Belled Buzzard. Now with his own eye he was seeing him.

Once, years and years and years ago, someone trapped a buzzard, and before freeing it clamped about its skinny neck a copper band with a cowbell pendent from it. Since then the bird so ornamented has been seen a hundred times—and heard oftener—over an area as wide as half the continent. It has been reported, now in Kentucky, now in Texas, now in North Carolina—now anywhere between the Ohio River and the Gulf. Cross-roads correspondents take their pens in hand to write to the country papers that on such and such a date, at such a place, So-and-So saw the Belled Buzzard. Always it is the Belled Buzzard, never a belled

buzzard. The Belled Buzzard is an institution.

There must be more than one of them. It seems hard to believe that one bird, even a buzzard in his prime, and protected by law in every Southern state and known to be a bird of great age, could live so long and range so far and wear a clinking cowbell all the time! Probably other jokers have emulated the original joker; probably if the truth were known there have been a dozen such; but the country people will have it that there is only one Belled Buzzard—a bird that bears a charmed life and on his neck a never-silent bell.

Squire Gathers regarded it a most untoward thing that the Belled Buzzard should have come just at this time. The movements of ordinary, unmarked buzzards mainly concerned only those whose stock had strayed; but almost anybody with time to spare might follow this rare and famous visitor, this belled and feathered junkman of the sky. Supposing now that someone followed it to-day—maybe followed it even to a certain thick clump of cypress in the middle of Little Niggerwool!

But at this particular moment the Belled Buzzard was heading directly away from that quarter. Could it be following him? Of course not! It was just by chance that it flew along the course the squire was taking. But, to make sure, he veered off sharply, away from the footpath into the high weeds so that the startled grasshoppers sprayed up in front of him in fan-like flights.

He was right; it was only a chance. The Belled Buzzard swung off, too, but in the opposite direction, with a sharp tonking of its bell, and, flapping hard, was in a minute or two out of hearing and sight, past the trees to the westward.

Again the squire skimped his dinner, and again he spent the long drowsy afternoon upon his front gallery. In all the sky there were now no buzzards visible, belled or unbelled—they had settled to earth somewhere; and this served somewhat to soothe the squire's pestered mind. This does not mean, though, that he was by any means easy in his thoughts. Outwardly he was calm enough, with the ruminative judicial air befitting the oldest justice of the peace in the county; but, within him, a little something gnawed unceasingly at his nerves like one of those small white worms that are to be found in seemingly sound nuts. About once in so long a tiny spasm of the muscles would contract the dewlap under his chin. The squire had never heard of that play, made famous by a famous player, wherein the murdered victim was a pedlar, too, and a clamouring bell the voice of unappeasable remorse in the murderer's ear. As a strict churchgoer the squire had no use for players or for play actors, and so was spared that added canker to his conscience. It was bad enough as it was.

¶

THAT night, as on the night before, the old man's sleep was broken and fitful and disturbed by dreaming, in which he heard a metal clapper striking against a brazen surface. This was one dream that came true. Just after daybreak he heaved himself out of bed, with a flop of his broad bare feet upon the floor, and stepped to the window and peered out. Half seen in the pinkish light, the Belled Buzzard flapped directly over his roof and flew due south, right toward the swamp—drawing a direct line through the air between the slayer and the victim—or, anyway, so it seemed to the watcher, grown suddenly tremulous.

Knee deep in yellow swamp water the squire squatted, with his shotgun cocked and loaded and ready, waiting to kill the bird that now typified for him guilt and danger and an abiding great fear. Gnats plagued him, and about him frogs croaked. Almost overhead a logcock clung lengthwise to a snag, watching him. Snake doctors, limber, long insects with bronze bodies and filmy wings, went back and forth like small living shuttles. Other buzzards passed and repassed, but the squire waited, forgetting the cramps in his elderly limbs and the discomfort of the water in his shoes.

At length he heard the bell. It came nearer and nearer, and the Belled Buzzard swung overhead not sixty feet up, its black bulk a fair target against the blue. He aimed and fired, both barrels bellowing at once and a fog of thick powder smoke enveloping him. Through the smoke he saw the bird careen and its bell jangled furiously; then the buzzard righted itself and was gone, fleeing so fast that the sound of its bell was hushed almost instantly. Two long wing feathers drifted slowly down; torn discs of gunwadding and shredded green scraps of leaves descended about the squire in a little shower.

He cast his empty gun from him so that it fell in the water and disappeared; and he

hurried out of the swamp as fast as his shaky legs would take him, splashing himself with mire and water to his eyebrows. Mucked with mud, breathing in great gulps, trembling, a suspicious figure to any eye, he burst through the weed curtain and staggered into the open, his caution all gone and a vast desperation fairly choking him—but the grey road was empty and the field beyond the road was empty; and, except for him, the whole world seemed empty and silent.

As he crossed the field Squire Gathers composed himself. With plucked handfuls of grass he cleansed himself of much of the swamp mire that coated him over; but the little white worm that gnawed at his nerves had become a cold snake that was coiled about his heart, squeezing it tighter and tighter!

This episode of the attempt to kill the Belled Buzzard occurred in the afternoon of the third day. In the forenoon of the fourth, the weather being still hot, with cloudless skies and no air stirring, there was a rattle of warped wheels in the squire's land and a hail at his yard fence. Coming out upon his gallery from the innermost darkened room of his house, where he had been stretched upon a bed, the squire shaded his eyes from the glare and saw the constable of his own magisterial district sitting in a buggy at the gate waiting.

The old man went down the dirt path slowly, almost reluctantly, with his head twisted up sidewise, listening, watching; but the constable sensed nothing strange about the other's gait and posture; the constable was full of the news he brought. He began to unload the burden of it without preamble.

"Mornin', Squire Gathers. There's been a dead man found in Little Niggerwool—and you're wanted."

He did not notice that the squire was holding on with both hands to the gate; but he did notice that the squire had a sick look out of his eyes and a dead, pasty colour in his face; and he noticed—but attached no meaning to it—that when the squire spoke his voice seemed flat and hollow.

"Wanted—fur—what?" The squire forced the words out of his throat, pumped them out fairly.

"Why, to hold the inquest," explained the constable. "The coroner's sick abed, and he said you bein' the nearest jestice of the peace you should serve."

"Oh," said the squire with more ease. "Well, where is it—the body?"

"They taken it to Bristow's place and put it in his stable for the present. They brought it out over on that side and his place was the nearest. If you'll hop in here with me, Squire, I'll ride you right over there now. There's enough men already gathered to make up a jury, I reckin."

"I—I ain't well," demurred the squire. "I've been sleepin' porely these last few nights. It's the heat," he added quickly.

"Well, suh, you don't look very brash, and that's a fact," said the constable; "but this here job ain't goin' to keep you long. You see it's in such shape—the body is—that there ain't no way of makin' out who the feller was nor whut killed him. There ain't nobody reported missin' in this county as we know of, either; so I jedge a verdict of a unknown person dead from unknown causes would be about the correct thing. And we kin git it all over mighty quick and put him underground right away, suh—if you'll go along now."

"I'll go," agreed the squire, almost quivering in his newborn eagerness. "I'll go right now." He did not wait to get his coat or to notify his wife of the errand that was taking him. In his shirtsleeves he climbed into the buggy, and the constable turned his horse and clucked him into a trot. And now the squire asked the question that knocked at his lips demanding to be asked—the question the answer to which he yearned for and yet dreaded.

"How did they come to find—it?"

"Well, suh, that's a funny thing," said the constable. "Early this mornin' Bristow's oldest boy—that one they call Buddy—he heard a cowbell over in the swamp and so he went to look; Bristow's got cows, as you know, and one or two of 'em is belled. And he kept on followin' after the sound of it till he got way down into the thickest part of them cypress slashes that's near the middle there; and right there he run acrost it—this body.

"But, suh, Squire, it wasn't no cow at all. No, suh; it was a buzzard with a cowbell on his neck—that's whut it was. Yes, suh; that there same old Belled Buzzard he's come back agin and is hangin' round. They tell me he ain't been seen round here sence the year of the yellow fever—I don't remember myself, but that's whut they tell me. The niggers over on the other side are right smartly worked up over it. They say—the

niggers do—that when the Belled Buzzard comes it's a sign of bad luck for somebody, shore!"

The constable drove on, talking on, garrulous as a guinea hen. The squire didn't heed him. Hunched back in the buggy, he harkened only to those busy inner voices filling his mind with thundering portents. Even so, his ear was first to catch above the rattle of the buggy wheels the far-away, faint tonk-tonk! They were about halfway to Bristow's place then. He gave no sign, and it was perhaps half a minute before his companion heard it, too.

The constable jerked the horse to a standstill and craned his neck over his shoulders.

"Well, by doctors!" he cried, "if there ain't the old scoundrel now, right here behind us!—I kin see him plain as day—he's got an old cowbell hitched to his neck; and he's shy a couple of feathers out of one wing. By doctors, that's somethin' you won't see every day! In all my born days I ain't never seen the beat of that!"

Squire Gathers did not look; he only cowered back farther under the buggy top. In the pleasing excitement of the moment his companion took no heed, though, of anything except the Belled Buzzard.

"Is he followin' us?" asked the squire in a curiously flat, weighted voice.

"Which—him?" answered the constable, still stretching his neck. "No, he's gone now—gone off to the left—jest a-zoomin', like he'd done forgot somethin'."

And Bristow's place was to the left! But there might still be time. To get the inquest over and the body underground—those were the main things. Ordinarily humane in his treatment of stock, Squire Gathers urged the constable to greater speed. The horse was lathered and his sides heaved wearily as they pounded across the bridge over the creek which was the outlet to the swamp and emerged from a patch of woods in sight of Bristow's farm buildings.

The house was set on a little hill among cleared fields and was in other respects much like the squire's own house except that it was smaller and not so well painted. There was a wide yard in front with shade trees and a lye hopper and a well-box, and a paling fence with a stile in it instead of a gate. At the rear, behind a clutter of outbuildings—a barn, a smokehouse and a corncrib—was a little peach orchard, and flanking the house on the right there was a good-sized cowyard, empty of stock at this hour, with feedracks ranged in a row against the fence. A two-year-old negro child, bareheaded and barefooted and wearing but a single garment, was grubbing busily in the dirt under one of these feedracks.

To the front fence a dozen or more riding horses were hitched, flicking their tails at the flies; and on the gallery men in their shirt-sleeves were grouped. An old negro woman, with her head tied in a bandanna and a man's old slouch hat perched upon the bandanna, peeped out from behind a corner. There were gaunt hound dogs wandering about, sniffing uneasily.

Before the constable had the horse hitched the squire was out of the buggy and on his way up the footpath, going at a brisker step than the squire usually travelled. The men on the porch hailed him gravely and ceremoniously, as befitting an occasion of solemnity. Afterward some of them recalled the look in his eye; but at the moment they noted it—if they noted it at all—subconsciously.

For all his haste the squire, as was also remembered later, was almost the last to enter the door; and before he did enter he halted and searched the flawless sky as though for signs of rain. Then he hurried on after the others, who clumped single file along a narrow, little hall, the bare, uncarpeted floor creaking loudly under their heavy farm shoes, and entered a good-sized room that had in it, among other things, a high-piled feather bed and a cottage organ—Bristow's best room, now to be placed at the disposal of the law's representatives for the inquest. The squire took the largest chair and drew it to the very centre of the room, in front of a fireplace, where the grate was banked with withering asparagus ferns. The constable took his place formally at one side of the presiding official. The others sat or stood about where they could find room—all but six of them, whom the squire picked for his coroner's jury, and who backed themselves against the wall.

The squire showed haste. He drove the preliminaries forward with a sort of tremulous insistence. Bristow's wife brought a bucket of fresh drinking water and a gourd, and almost before she was out of the room and the door closed behind her the squire had sworn his jurors and was calling the first witness, who it seemed likely would also be the only witness—Bristow's oldest boy. The boy wriggled in confusion as he sat on a cane-bottomed chair facing the old

magistrate. All there, barring one or two, had heard his story a dozen times already, but now it was to be repeated under oath; and so they bent their heads, listening as though it were a brand-new tale. All eyes were on him; none were fastened on the squire as he, too, gravely bent his head, listening—listening.

The witness began—but had no more than started when the squire gave a great, screeching howl and sprang from his chair and staggered backward, his eyes popped and the pouch under his chin quivering as though it had a separate life all its own. Startled, the constable made toward him and they struck together heavily and went down—both on their all fours—right in front of the fireplace.

The constable scrambled free and got upon his feet, in a squat of astonishment, with his head craned; but the squire stayed upon the floor, face downward, his feet flopping among the rustling asparagus greens—a picture of slavering animal fear. And now his gagging screech resolved itself into articulate speech.

"I done it!" they made out his shrieked words. "I done it! I own up—I killed him! He aimed fur to break up my home and I tolled him off into Niggerwool and killed him! There's a hole in his back if you'll look fur it. I done it—oh, I done it—and I'll tell everything jest like it happened if you'll jest keep that thing away from me! Oh, my Lawdy! Don't you hear it? It's a-comin' clos'ter and clos'ter—it's a-comin' after me! Keep it away——" His voice gave out and he buried his head in his hands and rolled upon the gaudy carpet.

And now they all heard what he had heard first—they heard the tonk-tonk-tonk of a cowbell, coming near and nearer toward them along the hallway without. It was as though the sound floated along. There was no creak of footsteps upon the loose, bare boards—and the bell jangled faster than it would dangling from a cow's neck. The sound came right to the door and Squire Gathers wallowed among the chair legs.

The door swung open. In the doorway stood a negro child, barefooted and naked except for a single garment, eyeing them with serious, rolling eyes—and, with all the strength of his two puny arms, proudly but solemnly tolling a small rusty cowbell he had found in the cowyard.

## *An Autumn Evening*

THE evening proceedings and manœuvres of the rooks are curious and amusing in the autumn. Just before dusk, they return in long strings from the foraging of the day, and rendezvous by thousands over Selborne Down, where they reel round in the air, and sport and dive in a playful manner, all the while exerting their voices, and making a loud cawing, which, being blended and softened by the distance that we at the village are below them, becomes a confused noise of chiding; or rather a pleasing murmur, very engaging to the imagination, and not unlike the cry of a pack of hounds in hollow, echoing woods, of the rushing of the wind in tall trees, or the tumbling of the tide upon a pebbly shore. When this ceremony is over with the last gleam of day they retire for the night to the deep beechen woods of Tisted and Ropley. We remember a little girl who, as she was going to bed, used to remark on such an occurrence, that the rooks were saying their prayers.

GILBERT WHITE.

# The Principino

*A romantic deception and its surprising social consequences*

## By BARONESS VON HUTTEN

HAYCOCK PLACE, a small square through which there is no thoroughfare and in which is situated Mrs. Pentecost's private hotel, is within a stone's throw of the Euston Road. No. 3 is on the left as one goes under the archway that leads from the noisy street, and is in no way distinguished from its neighbours, except for the group of three brilliant, very flourishing, red geraniums in the area window. These geraniums belong to Annie, the cook, and do not materially affect the mental atmosphere of the house. Opposite the house is a blank wall, on the other side of which some grim, scrawny old trees deploy their angular charms.

At the far end of the little place is a pickle factory, and thus it is that there seems, about dinner-time, to hang like a cloud over Haycock Place the curiously British smell of boiled mutton, sharpened by the tang of hot vinegar.

The first thing the Principino noticed that famous evening of his arrival was that everybody in the place must be having mutton for dinner, and probably they were; and the subtle accompanying odour of cabbage, the national vegetable, was also at once noted. Every country has its own distinguishing smell, and there is no doubt that the combined aromas of mutton and cabbage ought to be as deeply cherished in the memories of exiled Britons as that of garlic is to the Spaniards.

It was seven o'clock on a November evening, and Mrs. Pentecost's boarders—or, as she preferred to call them, guests—were sitting at dinner in the long, thin, slice of a dining-room, on the left of the house door. Mrs. Pentecost herself, a large glossy-pink woman, of course sat at the head of the table. On her right, Mr. Horace Brown, an elderly gentleman, vaguely known to be "something in the City"; on her left, Mr. Piom-Bino, the "Piom-Bino" whom every patron of the second-rate London music-halls has seen in his really wonderful juggling turn. A handsome, cheery-looking man this, with a big silky moustache curling upwards towards his eyes, much in the way that the ram wears his horns. Mrs. Piom-Bino, elderly, leathern, bad-tempered-looking, bore writ large all over her the desolating fact that she had been married for her money.

In all there were seven boarders, or guests, but only two of these need be mentioned: Mrs. Reeder and little Mrs. Quince. Mrs. Reeder was a large, almost handsome woman, whose originally fresh complexion was becoming a little patchy, and whose frizzed autumn-leaf-coloured front, worn in the manner dear to the ladies of the royal family, didn't match her back hair. She wore a heavy, black silk gown trimmed with pale blue, and she had a very handsome watch chain, and a large locket on another chain, and big diamond ear-rings. Little Mrs. Quince often wondered why ladies with large, red, beefy-looking ears always wore diamonds in them. Mrs. Quince herself had no diamonds; she was very small, very sallow, and her delicate little face, with the curiously fine features that so often belong to quite common American women, had lost everything but the pathetic memory of what once upon a time might have been real beauty. Her hair, however, pepper-and-salt and uninteresting, really grew on her head, and was beautifully brushed and cared for.

At the moment when this tale actually begins, Mrs. Quince was tearing her tough mutton apart with her knife and fork, her thin little claws of hands trembling violently. Never a week passed at Mrs. Pentecost's private hotel for refined ladies and gentlemen without a battle between the effulgent Mrs. Reeder and the lonely, poor, timid little American widow, and to-night's battle was just over.

"Some people," Mrs. Reeder announced, with a valedictory wave of the hand, "would do better if they didn't make statements that they can't prove."

"But I can prove it," burst out Mrs.

Quince; "I described it all to you. I've showed you her letters and my photographs of the villa."

"Humph!" says Mrs. Reeder. "I'll thank ye for some more mutton, with a bit o' fat."

Mr. Piom-Bino, who was a good-natured man, set down the vinegar cruet with a little bang. "Ladies, ladies!" he said, with a conquering twist of his moustache. "Live and let live."

"I am sure——" began little Mrs. Quince, with a dreadful tremor in her poor voice, but he hurried on:

"Of course you are; we all know, Mrs. Quince, that you never doubt anything any other lady may happen to say."

Mrs. Reeder gave vent to a little noise that could only be described as resembling the distant trumpeting of an agitated elephant. "I'd thank any lady to doubt my word," she pronounced balefully. "Me, that had me house in the best part of Brixton, and me own carriage and three servants."

Mr. Brown, a silent man, hid his mouth for a moment with what they would all have called his serviette. He knew perfectly well that Mrs. Reeder was what might be termed the star boarder of the establishment, that she was looking for a second husband, and he realised that her little red, aged, fat-embedded eye was occasionally turned on himself. He was a shy man with a passion for chess, and a hardly less strong one for historical novels of the swashbuckling period, but he was not afraid of Mrs. Reeder, for he was strong in the knowledge that—in the interests of self-preservation—he had the courage to be ruthless, and even downright rude.

"Has Mrs. Quince," he asked in his rather pleasant voice, leaning forward and smiling at Mrs. Reeder, "has Mrs. Quince ever seen Ellengowan Villa?"

Mrs. Reeder's face turned more red in its redder portions. "She has not," she answered, her mouth not quite so free of obstruction as might have been wished. "In me poor husband's day, I was not living in a boarding-house."

"Private hotel," burst out protestingly from several pairs of lips, with shocked glances at Mrs. Pentecost.

"Exactly," pursued Mr. Brown quietly. "I only meant that if Mrs. Quince is willing to believe all *you* tell her about Ellengowan Villa, I really don't see, my dear Mrs. Reeder, why you can't believe—I am sure *I* do—what she tells us about her daughter."

Mrs. Quince clasped her thin hands and leaned towards him across the table. "Thank you, Mr. Brown," she said; "you are always very kind to me; you might even be an American."

Before the embarrassed gentleman could answer this compliment Mrs. Reeder got in a neat blow. "I take it," she said grandly, twirling the various rings on her fat, red fingers, "that I look like a lady who might have a villa in the best part of Brixton." After a murmur of assent from her audience she added, pointing at Mrs. Quince, her cruel little eyes shining with delighted malice: "And does Mrs. Quince look like the mother of a princess—I ask you?"

Mrs. Quince burst into tears, pushing back her plate, rose and stumbled from the room. There was a moment's silence. Everyone at the table except Mrs. Reeder was embarrassed, and Mr. Horace Brown was more than embarrassed—he was angry. Drawing himself up very straight in his chair, he said hotly: "No man on earth could have said that." Then he, too, rose and left the room, closing the door with something almost like a bang.

Mrs. Quince had fled up the dark stairs, and as the little gentleman followed her the dust that her hurrying feet had raised from the thick carpet tickled his nose and made him sneeze. He found the poor little woman sitting in her rocking-chair, rocking like mad and chewing gum to console herself. When he knocked, she knew at once who it must be, and bade him come in, for her room was one of those known to all hard-up dwellers in the tents of others as a bed-sitting-room; that is, there was a bamboo-and-paper screen round the bed, and another smaller one hid the simple mysteries of Mrs. Quince's toilet. The dressing-table, being supposedly a more respectable piece of furniture than the washing-stand, was exposed to view, and Mr. Brown noticed—as he had noticed before with profound approval—the beautiful polish on the simple silver brushes and boxes, and the spotless cover of the pin-cushion. In a large and expensive silver frame was a photograph of a young girl. To this photograph Mrs. Quince's hand made a fluttering sign, as Mr. Brown sat down.

"I can't see why she can't believe me,"

she burst out, " with the Princess's photograph there on my table, as large as life."

" I suppose you have had no recent news of Her Highness ? " the little man asked, by way of drawing her mind away from the recent battle.

She shook her head sadly. " Not really, you know," she said. " I told *them* I had. She is very busy, you see ; these Roman nobles live in a perfect whirl, and what with her son—they call him the Principino—of course she hasn't really any time ; besides, she never was much of a hand at the pen, Carrie wasn't."

He nodded. They had both lived in the house nearly two years, and they had always been friendly towards each other, and he knew more about the lonely little woman than anyone else. " She must be very like you," he observed after a pause, going to the dressing-table and taking up the photograph.

Mrs. Quince nodded without emotion. " Yes, I was a real pretty girl once. Carrie was as like me as two peas, only she had her father's temper—his temper was something fierce, Mr. Quince's was. I just wish he was here," she added, with sudden venom, " when Mrs. Reeder talks to me like that."

" So do I," agreed Mr. Brown, fervently ; " however, I was going to ask you, Mrs. Quince, if you couldn't just make up your mind never to answer her. If I were you I would never mention the Princess or the Principino, or anything about 'em. You see, she's jealous, Mrs. Reeder is ; she knows perfectly well it's all true, and she's jealous."

Mrs. Quince looked at him wistfully. Her eyes, which were of that singularly pale blue that looks uninteresting at a distance, but has a curious fascination when seen at close range, filled with sudden tears. " I don't know," she moaned ; " perhaps she *don't* believe it. It's perfectly true I don't look like the mother of a princess. Perhaps nobody believes it. Perhaps—why, Mr. Brown "—rising suddenly, she approached him, her tiny body shaking with nerves—" perhaps *you* don't believe it ! "

He drew back, almost horrified by the force of her anguish. He was horribly embarrassed, for he never had believed the story, and wouldn't have told her so for the world. In his gentle, middle-aged breast there beat a heart always capable of a throb for a woman in distress and, nourished on the wildest type of romantic fiction, full of kind and faded chivalry. So he lied like a man, and like a woman she knew that he lied. After faintly protesting that his lie had been the whitest of truths, Mr. Brown beat a retreat, to smoke the pipe of repentance in his more comfortable, lower-down room.

¶

IT was still early, and a few minutes later little Mrs. Quince, attired in her shabby sealskin jacket and a pathetic picture hat enriched with oft-curled ostrich feathers, crept quietly downstairs. She was going to take a walk and try to amuse herself with looking into shop windows. She went noiselessly past the dining-room door, behind which guests were engaged in refusing the withered apples and pigmy oranges that Mrs. Pentecost called dessert, and opened the hall door. It was late November, and there was a fog, and more than ever the little square reeked of mutton and cabbage and vinegar. The sky was quite invisible, and the pavement under the solitary light that starred the darkness was black and greasy—it was a dreadful night, but anything was better than sitting in her room, staring at the photograph of her discredited Princess. Mrs. Quince picked up her skirts with a gesture of old-fashioned elegance and trotted down the steps. At the foot of them she tripped and nearly fell into the arms of a slight young man who was on the point of mounting them.

" Per Bacco ! " exclaimed the young man, while the little lady murmured excuses. She had dropped her handbag and it had opened in the fall ; its contents lay in the yellow murk at their feet. The young man lit a match with much agility and quickness, and picked up the letters, the key, the shabby little purse, and one or two other little articles, and put them back with care.

" Seems quite pleasant," Mrs. Quince observed, with a shy little air of being a travelled person, " to hear a gentleman swearing in Italian."

The young man laughed. " The Signora speaks Italian ? " he asked.

" Oh, no—that is to say, only a very little ; but my daughter lives in Italy—in Rome. Her husband," she added, with dignity, " is Prince Giulio Savarelli."

Once more the young man ejaculated

"Per Bacco!" but this time in a voice of such amazement that Mrs. Quince stood still in the lamplight and stared up at him. She had not to look up very far, for, tiny though she was, the young man, topped her by barely a couple of inches. He was very young, she saw, and very handsome, with velvety cheeks of that golden brown just flushed with rose that only Italians seem able to achieve. Absurdly large eyes, fringed like bulrush-fringed lakes, gazing at her with such surprise that she gasped out:

"What is the matter? Why do you look like that?"

"Because," the young man answered, "you must be Signora Queence, mother of the Signora Principessa."

This sudden recognition, following so closely on the disaster of the dinner-table, was almost too much for the little lady.

"Oh!" she cried, clasping her hands in the way that Mr. Brown thought so touching and Mrs. Reeder and Mrs. Piom-Bino so ridiculously affected. "Then you believe it—you do believe it! Mercy sakes—what a comfort you are."

At this, naturally enough, the beautiful youth was much surprised. "Believe it. Believe what?" he returned, unbuttoning his coat. "I do not understand what you mean, but I have a letter for you from the Signora Principessa."

Mrs. Quince's heart gave a wild leap. If only for once Carrie had written on coroneted paper, or even on paper with the address of the palace embossed on it! But no; the letter consisted of one sheet of plain notepaper, and was signed simply "Carrie."

The young man, who was full of the delightful, innocent curiosity about other people incident to his age, lit a cigarette and watched this odd, obviously mad old lady as she read her letter. Knowing its contents as he did, his amazement was great, when Mrs. Quince's eyes filled with tears and she turned to him with a despairing little shrug.

"It's no good," she moaned; "it's just like all the others; they'll never believe it."

They walked slowly away back under the archway into the comparative bustle of the mean street, and because he was really and truly interested, his lively young sense of romance full of response, because she was utterly alone, and even the faithful Brown doubted her, she burst out and told him the whole story.

"But why do you care?" he interrupted once to say. "Five hundred lire is five hundred lire. If I had five hundred lire I shouldn't care if they said I had never had a mother and father."

"Well, you don't understand. It's dreadful for me; that old elephant of a woman is always after me, and now," she gave a little hard sob, "even Mr. Brown doesn't believe it."

The youth was more or less of a rascal; he was a person without much principle; he had a gay and irresponsible love of mischief that, only twenty though he was, had already got him into manifold scrapes, but he was a warm-hearted, affectionate boy, and he had, in Italy, a little mother whom he adored. He was exceedingly sorry for the mother of his employer's wife, so he drew her hand kindly through his arm and, hailing a taxi, took her to a little Italian restaurant, for she owned up to being hungry and he was famishing. For more than an hour this strangely-matched couple sat in their corner eating and talking. They had macaroni, they had beefsteak, to which the youth displayed an astounding devotion, they had salad reeking with garlic. The young man, whose name it appears was Aurelio, devoured pounds of bread, using it in the economical way of Italians of his class as a mop to gather up every scrap of food and glimmer of fat from his plate.

They drank Chianti out of thick glasses, and the whole meal was topped off with hot, fluffy custard with rum in it. Who it was that suggested The Plan, neither of them could ever remember, but suggested it was, and helped by the good food and wine it grew and shaped itself with almost ridiculous ease. It was a delight to little Mrs. Quince to hear the boy shout with laughter, for he had a way of throwing back his head and showing all his impeccable teeth that seemed to her the very embodiment of youthful joy and life; and he, on his part, was honestly touched and pleased to see the poor little faded lady revive and even mildly flourish under the influence of the great idea.

At about nine they left the restaurant and made their way back towards Euston. "Be at the restaurant sharp at half-past twelve," the young man said as they parted. "I'll have the money and will settle all the details. Oh, Santo Dio!" he added, roaring with laughter, "what a glorious time we shall have!" Then, still twinkling audaciously, he took off his hat and, without

apologising, kissed his astounded new friend. "Good night," he called, disappearing into the gloom. "Good night, *Grandmamma!*"

For several days after her meeting with Aurelio Ruffo, little Mrs. Quince lived her usual quiet life, showing no difference in her manner, kindly polite, nervously shy—rather like, as Mr. Brown thought, a poor, little, tame squirrel. It was a fortunate circumstance for her that at this time the splendid Mrs. Reeder paid her annual visit to a niece in West Hampstead. The magnificence and glory of living in West Hampstead was something to which only Mrs. Reeder could give just expression; but as she left Haycock Place for these supernal heights the next day but one after the arrival of the Principessa's letter, it was only during one dinner-hour that Mrs. Quince was obliged to listen to her explanations of bliss.

"Everything very elegant, they 'ave, with a conservatory, and buses at the end of the road; but, of course, we never use the buses; we use the motor-car. Mr. Hebble-Hubbard, being a stockbroker, o' course has everything of the very best. I declare," the large lady went on, picking her teeth with gentility, "it will quite take me back to Ellengowan Villa."

Mr. Brown, who, according to his wont, was eating his dinner in almost perfect silence, leaned forward at this familiar name, and chancing as he did so to catch Mrs. Quince's eye he was amazed to see in that pale-blue orb something more like a gleam of humour than he had ever beheld in it. Mrs. Reeder had also apparently observed this unfamiliar expression, and gave a mild trumpet as if about to speak, and then thought better of it. For, naturally, it was impossible that little Mrs. Quince could smile at a suggestion of Ellengowan Villa.

"How long shall you be away?" Mrs. Quince asked quietly, using her knife and fork in the curiously mincing manner of American women of her age and class.

"I shall be back on Thursday; they urged me to stay for Christmas," Mrs. Reeder replied, "but they'll have the house full. They are giving a dance Christmas Eve; but I've never been to a dance since my poor Reeder died, so I declined."

Dinner was almost over. Mrs. Piom-Bino had announced that she and her husband had also, after declining many pressing invitations, decided to grace Mrs. Pentecost's hospitable mansion during the holidays; and Mr. Brown, in answer to a direct question from Mrs. Pentecost, had answered gravely that he, too, was staying in town and looking forward to a little rest.

Mrs. Pentecost, who was a generous, cheery soul, one's usual prejudices against landladies to the contrary notwithstanding, rose and smiled at her guests. "I've got two turkeys coming from Ireland," she stated, "and my sister-in-law has promised to give me the best roast of beef in Devonshire for Christmas Day. We'll have a jolly little family party."

In the warmth and friendliness of mind, engendered by these prognostications, everyone had already turned to the door when Mrs. Quince made her astounding revelation.

"It will be lovely," she announced, straightening the bow of lace at her throat with gently curled little fingers. "I am so glad you are all going to be here, for my grandson is arriving on Tuesday."

"Your grandson!" Most of the ladies and gentlemen repeated these words in their surprise. But it was Mrs. Reeder's voice that carried best, and it was to Mrs. Reeder that Mrs. Quince replied:

"Yes, I've never spoken to you of my grandson, Giulio Savarelli."

There was a hush that contained probably the most satisfactory minute of all little Jessie Quince's life. To Mr. Brown's mind there was something quite dramatically beautiful in the sight of the little woman trying so hard not to look vulgarly triumphant at this new crisis. There were two small apricot-coloured flames in her thin cheeks; and her hands, with the carefully pointed and polished nails, still smoothing the lace bow, trembled violently. But Mrs. Quince's head, held well up in the American way, was proud only in its carriage; her eyes were dropped, and a look of extreme self-depreciation was on her face. Good Mrs. Pentecost burst out into raptures. She was delighted.

"How nice for Mrs. Quince. Was he Her Highness, the Princess's, little boy? She must fix up a nice room for him. The pink room on the third floor would be the best, because the chimney never smoked there, and she knew that Italians needed the light and heat. For her part she had always felt sorry for organ-grinders."

The polite Piom-Bino had opened the

dining-room door with his usual grand air, and Mrs. Reeder rounded the end of the table and led the way out; but on the threshold she paused, for the incredible Mrs. Quince was making another world-shaking statement.

"Yes, it is the Princess's son," she observed majestically. "But he is not a little boy, Mrs. Pentecost, and you needn't bother about the pink room, for he is going to stay at the Ritz."

Twenty pounds is a large, a very large, sum of money, but still it does not last for ever, and in view of the great campaign ahead of her, Mrs. Quince supplemented it by doing something to which throughout all her pathetic vicissitudes, she had hitherto never stooped. She sold some of the cherished little bits of jewellery that she always kept guarded under lock and key in a mother-of-pearl box with Santa Barbara on the lid; her grandmother's garnet earrings were sacrificed, the little old ring with a diamond embedded in the twist of gold, and the curious old-fashioned set of Roman mosaics, including bracelet, earrings, and a brooch as large as a hot-cross bun.

This remarkably hideous parure bore on its immense surfaces brilliant representations of St. Peter's, the Coliseum, the fountain of Trevi, Trajan's Column, and other monumental beauties of Rome. Mrs. Quince considered them the most beautiful pieces of jewellery in the world, and they were, moreover, heirlooms, for her father had bought them for her mother sixty years before. There was, however, no help for it. If the Great Plan was to be carried out, her wounded pride healed for ever, and her position in the boarding-house consolidated and elevated, she *must* have money. And it is perhaps not so strange as at first sight it may appear, that by the time Aurelio brought back the money for the "Roman set," the little lady, in her interest and growing fondness for the attractive and spontaneous boy, had almost lost sight of the fact that The Plan was, after all, what she herself would have called a fake. She nearly believed, as the young Roman clerk kissed her hand in his pretty way, that he *was* her grandson.

As for Aurelio, he was thoroughly enjoying himself, and his admiration for her stroke of genius in what she called "locating him at the Ritz," was unbounded.

"Oh, bravo! bravo!" he cried, throwing a kiss towards the ceiling with one hand while he rolled a cigarette with the other. "They'll burst with envy, these old beasts of yours."

Mrs. Quince was silent for a moment. She was not chewing gum, because she had discovered that Aurelio regarded that soothing custom not with dislike, but with naïve and unbridled amusement.

"It is dreadful to tell so many falsehoods," she said. "I suppose I shall be punished for it some day, but you don't know how they've tormented me. Even Mrs. Pentecost never believed me. Piom-Bino was polite, but even he never pretended to."

Aurelio pricked up his ears.

"Piom-Bino! That is an Italian name."

"Yes, but he isn't an Italian, and that wife of his is so ugly-tempered, I don't mind telling her lies." After a pause she added wistfully, "but I'm sorry about Mr. Brown."

Aurelio's ears, which were really slightly faun-like in shape, pricked up still further under his glossy chestnut curls.

"Who's Mr. Brown?" he asked inquisitively.

"He is the gentleman who was here before I came—something in the City. I am sure he has a lovely nature," she sighed, "but—but he doesn't believe me either."

"But he will when I have done with him," laughed the young man, with a vague gesture. He spoke good English, for Prince Savarelli's banking house was a very important one, with English and American affiliations, and the boy had been given special facilities for learning the language so useful to the business; he had, Mrs. Quince knew, been in London twice before on errands connected with the bank.

The Princess Savarelli was the wife of a very rich man, but she was not generous and had never before sent her mother more than twenty-five dollars at Christmas. It was plain that Aurelio, although young, had all the shrewd insight of his race, and didn't like the Signora Principessa; he didn't like the Signore Principe, and he loathed the Principino, who was two years younger than himself, and who apparently displayed all the arrogance of high-placed people half of whose blood is inferior. But for several years Aurelio had been about the old palace in the Street of the Fountains: first, he quite cheerfully informed his new patron, as a page, then, after his promotion to the bank on the discovery of his quick wits and

eel-like qualities, as a kind of unofficial messenger between the late-rising, chocolate-sipping, indolent Prince and his busy, energetic cousin, Don Paolo, who was his partner, and the brains of the whole business.

"She is beautiful, the Signora Principessa, oh, yes, beautiful!" the young man explained, with the unconscious cynicism that in Italians so frequently goes hand-in-hand with real warm-heartedness and kindness, "particularly now since her hair is fair, but," he added with a shrewd glance at Mrs. Quince, "her mouth is not so good as yours; thin, you know—too thin."

Mrs. Quince sighed. "There was always a hard streak in her," she returned, a little wearily. After a minute she put the question to him that for days she had been keeping back. "Does she ever mention me? I mean to little Giuilo, the Principino?"

"No," answered Aurelio, carefully staring out of the window.

"But when she gave the money to you and told you to look me up. What did she say? She must have said something."

And Aurelio lied, as any decent man would have done in his place: "She sent you her dear salutes, and said she was sorry she could not invite you to Rome."

"Well, that, of course," Mrs. Quince answered calmly, "always was impossible. You see, the Prince made that a condition: he wouldn't have married her unless she promised not to see me."

Aurelio's exclamation was sonorous and musical, but it was not polite. He was exceedingly sorry for the faded little lady whose daughter had made such a splendid marriage, and ruthless as he could be on occasion, wild horses couldn't have torn from him the fact that her grandson had all his life been taught that she was dead. They became real friends, this singular couple, during the few days that elapsed between their meeting and the evening when he arrived in full panoply at Haycock Place. They had chosen this evening because it was the day of the arrival home of the great Mrs. Reeder, and without her presence much savour would have been lacking to the situation.

Fully instructed, Mrs. Quince came down to dinner that night a little late. Mrs. Reeder, whom her entrance interrupted in the midst of the vivid description of her visit to West Hampstead, scowled angrily as the little lady slipped in, and she scowled still more fiercely when the pleasant Piom-Bino exclaimed kindly:

"What a beautiful gown, Mrs. Quince!"

Mrs. Quince, indeed, was mildly resplendent in a soft grey cashmere gown, embellished with a square shawl of very good black lace, and no one but she could know that the gown had been made over for a small sum from a relic of her former days, and that the shawl had been obtained almost at the sword's point as a loan by the ingenious Aurelio from a shop-keeping friend of his.

Mrs. Quince bowed. "I am glad you like it," she said with the intense dignity that large women never can achieve. "It is nothing, but as my grandson is coming I thought I would put it on." And even Mrs. Reeder wondered irritably how many other handsome, if rather old-fashioned, garments that hateful little woman had been keeping concealed from the collective boarding-house eye.

¶

IT being Christmas Eve, all the guests had risen to sartorial heights unusual to them. Mrs. Reeder seemed to have burst out all over in an irruption of beads, and wore all her gold chains. Mrs. Pentecost wore her famous amethyst moiré, and even little Mrs. Piom-Bino was, so to speak, new down to the waist, wearing as she did her usual evening dark-blue skirt and a brand-new silk blouse of a peculiarly livid raspberry. The table, too, was decorated—and looked very attractive—with bunches of chrysanthemums and every scrap of silver or nickel that the good landlady possessed. Amy and Kate, the two maids, bribed into the wearing, for that occasion only, of caps, had just set the two turkeys down, one in front of Mrs. Pentecost and the other before Mr. Piom-Bino, when a loud ring at the door startled the company. Everybody was silent, for everybody realised that this must be the hitherto unbelieved-in Principino.

For reasons of his own Aurelio had decided to speak with a strong Italian accent, but this circumstance, while in one way rather confusing the guests, in another way put them at their ease. It comforted Mrs. Reeder, for example, that the young man spoke such bad English, and when at last he was seated at the foot of the table, with Mrs. Quince on his right and Mrs.

Reeder on his left, he looked around him with an air of utter beatitude, so that even the uncongenial Mrs. Piom-Bino whispered to Mr. Brown: "How he loves his grandmamma."

For Aurelio held Mrs. Quince's hand in his. He gave her a beautiful slice of meat off his own plate, twice he rose and kissed her warmly—once for himself and once for *la Mamma*. Altogether it seemed to be proved conclusively that never in the world had a young man been more devoted to his grandmother.

The turkey was delicious, and the roast beef was, as Mrs. Reeder expressed it, as tender as butter. The red wine, made in some back premises in Soho, was voted excellent. There is no doubt that the presence of a prince is an enlivening circumstance in almost any society.

Over the trifle Mrs. Reeder made a despairing snatch at her vanishing prestige. "I suppose," she said to the young man, "you know Sir 'Arold Giddings?"

Aurelio placed his forefinger upon his brow and pondered for a moment. "I dare say," he answered. "I tink I do, but for ze moment I do not recall."

Mrs. Reeder bridled. "He and his lady are great friends of mine. He was an alderman, and the King knighted him himself."

Aurelio straightened himself, and an indescribable cloud of cold dignity seemed to descend on him. "Ah, no," he returned aloofly. "I have met ze Lord Mayor, of course, good man; but aldermans—no."

Mrs. Reeder's purple face turned almost black. Then somebody—no one ever knew who—gave a nervous laugh, and it was Mrs. Quince who tried to restore peace.

"Oh, but Au—Giulio, you don't understand English society," she murmured hesitatingly. "Sir Alfred—Sir Arthur—oh, dear me, I mean the gentleman Mrs. Reeder mentioned—is very well known, quite the friend of all the nobility."

Aurelio looked at her down his nose. "Excuse me, Grandmamma," he said haughtily, "you are mistaken. You forget who I am. I have no doubt that the gentleman you speak of is a most excellent person." Then, with the voice of one changing the subject for purposes of social convenience, he went on: "By the way, I have not told you that the Duchess wants us to dine to-morrow night; the Prime Minister is to be there, and Lord and Lady Gloucester, and, of course, our Ambassador."

An awed hush reigned in the room for the moment. Then Mrs. Reeder said feebly: "Sir 'Arold 'as met Mr. Asquith twice," and conversation became general.

Coffee was served in the drawing-room, a sinister apartment with dark walls and dingy tapestry furniture. Aurelio, after his recent outburst of passionate class-feeling, was extremely agreeable, and expressed the wish that Mrs. Reeder, who was so fond of her canary, could see his mother's aviary at one of their places in the Sabine Hills. "Every kinds of birds," explained Aurelio. "Some from South America, some from China. My mother is very fond them, but my father care only for horses." He then embarked on a series of tales about his father and mother, and their different possessions. And his reckless imagery, the fluctuating nature of his accent was so pronounced that little Mrs. Quince trembled in the new slippers he had that afternoon insisted on buying her out of the fund.

Possibly, if the young man had been a little more prudent, a little more guarded in his tales, he would have done what is known as giving the show away. But so wild were his stories, so hair-raising his elucidations of the manners and customs of the Roman aristocracy, that through very amazement his listeners believed him. He knew everyone in London, it appeared; his detailed description of the boudoir of a certain famous marchioness striking awe into these guileless British hearts. Only once was he in momentary danger, and that was when he described the glorious Persian carpets that in this historical apartment covered the "Tiles." Mr. Brown, who sat as usual in a distant corner of the room, bent his mild eyes upon the young man.

"*Tiles* in Piccadilly?" he asked gently.

For a second, Aurelio stared; then he laughed. "Do you not know," he retorted, his accent very strong indeed, "that when she was a young girl the lady lived in Italy, and that when she married she had tiles put down throughout her private apartments?"—then nimbly he went on to describe the different kinds of tiles that so unexpectedly adorned the great house near the Park, and once more silence fell round him, like that that surrounds a group of Orientals when under the thrall of the professional story-teller. At ten o'clock

negus and cakes and tea were served. After which, by way of ending up the perfect evening, Aurelio sang, accompanying himself with the facile skill of his kind; his dark cheeks were glowing, his eyes blazed, he was as much intoxicated as a particularly sober-living young man could be who has had two glasses of British claret and one glass of negus. He sang, and sang delightfully, in a slightly throaty, high baritone voice; and so great was the emotional appeal that he made that Mrs. Reeder, who was not readily overcome, found herself talking to him in the friendliest way, while she wiped her eyes over one of his songs.

Mr. Piom-Bino, who had been out and returned not quite so indisputedly sober as might have been wished, created a diversion by calling Aurelio Royal Highness, for the excellent reason that, after all, a prince is a prince, English or Italian. The rest of the party, however, having subdued their tongues to the strange word, called him Principino.

As the evening went on, Mrs. Quince became more quiet and had very little to say, excepting when the enthusiasm of one of the other guests forced her to agree that her grandson was a perfect duck and so awfully distinguished, or of being so obviously a prince that no one could mistake him for anything else. Indeed, Aurelio, in his perfectly correct, though slightly shabby, best clothes, his brilliant Bond Street shirt, and perfect new pumps, might well, as far as looks were concerned, have been the great gentleman he pretended. The real Principino, the poor little Giulio, had he been there, would have cut no such figure, for he was small and surly, and devoted all of his time when in society to devouring his finger-nails.

¶

AT last twelve o'clock came and the party broke up. There was much coquetry and a little feigned reluctance when the Principino kissed the ladies' hands, and the whole party conducted the young man down the stairs. At the archway he turned.

"Mind you are in time for lunch, Grandmamma," he called out, waving his hat. "The American Ambassador has only a little time."

The American Ambassador! Quietly Mrs. Pentecost's boarders went back into the house and separated for the night. Never had Mrs. Quince been wished good night with such fervour.

"I'll not forget to send you that jar of ginger," Mrs. Piom-Bino told her. "I'm sure the Principino will enjoy it."

And even Mrs. Reeder gave the little woman's hand a friendly squeeze. "You're going to the Ritz to-morrow," she said. "I am lunching with a lady and gentleman in Bayswater. You will be going by Underground, of course? We might go together."

Mrs. Quince, looking up, met Mr. Brown's quiet gaze. "Thank you, Mrs. Reeder," she returned, with a little toss of her head. "I'm going to take a taxi."

To the excited imaginations of Mrs. Pentecost's guests, Mrs. Quince lunched with her grandson on Christmas Day at the Ritz; but in reality the little lady and the young man partook of modest good cheer in Soho. Aurelio was in a state of greatest delight over his achievements of the night before.

"Oh, that old *Canaglia!*—that old witch!" he cried, waving the Chianti flask recklessly over Mrs. Quince's glass. "Never shall I forget her face when I told her about my mother's ropes of pearls. Oh, Per Bacco! *my mother!* The Signora Principessa would die if she knew that I called myself her son!"

Mrs. Quince nodded. "Yes, I suppose she wouldn't like it. She was always very proud, Carrie was."

"Carrie?" queried the young man, his huge brown eyes glowing with curiosity.

"The Principessa's name is Carrie," returned the little lady.

"*Eh diamine*, the Signora Principessa's, my beloved mamma's name is Violetta."

Mrs. Quince laid down her fork and leaned back; she was a little pale; she was able to bear with bravery the fact that her daughter had given her up at her husband's bidding; her grieving for not being able to see her grandchild had become dimmed by time, as grief, by the wisdom of God, always does. Having used her little capital on the occasion of her daughter's marriage for the clothes and appurtenances that her fierce little American pride could not allow the girl to go without, she was now, at the beginning of her old age, with a fortitude all the more admirable because she was utterly unconscious of it, that sad thing, the poorest one of a group of several unfriendly women. And all these things

she bore well. But somehow this business of the name was almost too much for her, and her childlike blue eyes filled with tears.

"Caroline Sarah was her name," she exclaimed a moment later with a little burst of fierceness. "It was her grandmother's name; she didn't ought to have changed it. Hard and cruel, hard and cruel, she always was!" Then, suddenly, she added: "My baby," and the tears rolled down her face.

Aurelio sprang to his feet and, putting one arm around her shoulders, mopped her eyes dexterously with his beautifully fine, highly scented cambric handkerchief (both these princely attributes were provided by the fund). "Don't cry, don't cry," he murmured, as unconscious as a child of the various pairs of eyes fixed on him. "She is a horrible woman, a terrible selfish person; I 'ave never liked her—no, nobody likes her. What does it matter what she calls herself?"

Mrs. Quince was tearful, but she had a sense of humour, and the young man's thus attempting to console her tickled that sense. "That's all right," she said. "Sit down. My! what lovely perfume!"

Aurelio flourished his handkerchief with grace and delicacy before his face. "Peau d'Espagne," he announced, "Bond Street."

Then she perceived that on his little finger he wore a large diamond which couldn't possibly have come out of the fund.

"My gracious!" she exclaimed. "Where did you get that ring?"

He laughed, wagging his finger so that the diamond sparkled. "There is a jeweller in the City who is an Italian; the ring is not mine. I borrowed it."

"I never heard of a jeweller lending a ring before."

He grinned gracelessly. "Nor I, but"—he explained with a sudden air of extreme demureness, his lambent eyes downcast, his cherry-coloured lips drawn down at the corners—"he has a—wife."

Mrs. Quince took this bit of information very calmly, for she didn't in the least understand what the young rascal meant. He saw this, and in a curious way it added to the charm the little elderly lady had for him. Like most Italians, he was a shrewd student of character and of an analytical turn of mind, and the little American, with her queer mixture of sharpness and innocence, was quite new to him. So he didn't in the least feel, the handsome youth of twenty, that he was wasting his Christmas Day in spending it thus with the Signora Principessa's mother.

In the afternoon they went to a cinema; then Mrs. Quince went home to rest, for she was dining out with her grandson. This time at the Italian Ambassador's. Aurelio arrived at half-past seven, for ambassadors always dine at eight, in a taxi, and Mrs. Pentecost, at the instigation of the boarders, herself opened the door to bring the young nobleman in. There was a round of handshaking and seasonal compliments; and the Principino, with the bland affability of his class, deigned to accept a glass of Mrs. Reeder's sherry—a gift, this, from the stockbroking gentleman in West Hampstead; and while he was standing sipping at his wine, with an air of profound appreciation, he made the great announcement.

"I know you will all be sorry to hear," he said, his accent very marked, "but you are to lose my beloved grandmother. I am taking her back to Rome with me to-morrow."

Various were the exclamations and questions; everyone expressed regret at losing Mrs. Quince, but everyone declared that the step was a perfectly natural one for her to take, considering that the Principessa was her only daughter.

"Yes," Aurelio agreed; "my mother can't stand it any longer. Her arms are aching to—how does one say?—embrace her parent."

Mrs. Quince stood very quietly by him in the grey gown, a handsome black velvet cloak on her shoulders. (Aurelio always refused to tell how he got that cloak.) She was a little pale, Mr. Brown noticed, as he stood quietly behind his chair. Poor Mrs. Quince, she was pale because, although these people had been selfish even when not unkind, and because although she had thoroughly enjoyed the carrying out of her revenge, she was, as all generous-hearted people are, a little ashamed of having taken them in.

"I hope you won't all forget me," she stammered, feeling as she spoke how absurd the words were. "I shall always remember you." Then for the first time Mr. Horace Brown's voice was heard.

"You speak as if you were going to China; after all, you are not going so very far away."

"Not far!" exclaimed Mrs. Piom-Bino.

"My word, Mr. Brown, I have never been there. Have you?"

Mr. Brown stroked his neat, grey moustache and looked at Aurelio with profound gravity.

As Aurelio met his eyes—Aurelio suddenly knew. Aurelio knew that Mr. Brown knew; and on their way to Soho in the taxi as he chatted and laughed, and explained to the little lady that he had found for her in Battersea a much nicer home than Mrs. Pentecost's, his busy, alert mind was working with his new knowledge, and suddenly leaning forward, he kissed his companion. "You are feeling lonely," he told her, "because you are leaving that place where you have been so long; but you must not be lonely. I shall often come to London, and though I am not your grandson, I wish—I wish I were."

"Oh, Aurelio!" she exclaimed.

He nodded. "Yes, and I come twice a year on business—and, if I want it, they'd give me a position in the London branch. Shall we go on pretending you are my *nonna*—my grandmother?"

Poor Mrs. Quince was touched, for she was feeling lonely, and she did dread moving into another house; even although by so doing she should appear to the boarders, and particularly to Mrs. Reeder, to have been transported to the princely glories of Rome; and Aurelio was a dear boy. He was, she knew, going to be one of those men who, while they will make women suffer, at least never bore them; whatever he might become in the passage of time, Aurelio Ruffo would always be entertaining. So she patted his hand—the diamond on which had visibly affected the boarders—and they spent a very happy evening in their little restaurant.

Early the next morning, as the punctual Mr. Brown left No. 3, on his way to the City, he was surprised to find, in the street a few hundreds of yards away from the house, a very dandified young man in a tight-waisted overcoat and brand-new gloves awaiting him. After shaking hands the two men walked on together.

The next night Mrs. Quince who, to tell the truth, had cried more than was favourable to her appearance, was sitting in lonely state in her new room at Mrs. MacCutcheon's Private Hotel in Battersea. The room was very, very small, being one of those known as a hall-bedroom. It was hardly wider than the passage outside, and it was on the top of four very long flights of stairs. But it was clean, the indefatigable Aurelio having searched the neighbourhood till he found a room that satisfied him in this respect, and it was so cheap that Mr. Quince felt that here she could do without that extra five pounds that usually helped her through the winter. For the two conspirators had, as Aurelio with much joy said, blown every penny of the fund.

¶

MRS. MACCUTCHEON'S was a very respectable house of its kind; but poor Mrs. Quince, that first evening, a sudden rainstorm beating at the window, longed with bitter intensity for the familiar troubles of Haycock Place. She would have been glad—if the heroic truth must be told—to see even Mrs. Reeder. At that moment, her dinner, composed of a boiled egg and cup of tea, was over. She had no rocking-chair; only one comfort was left to her, and going to her dressing-table she opened what she herself would have called her bureau drawer and took from it a new piece of chewing gum, alluringly wrapped in silver paper.

"I shall feel better to-morrow," she told herself sternly; "this is just nervousness, and missing that boy. Lors, how I *do* miss Aurelio!" His photograph stood on her table, a new and beautiful one that he had given her. He had also given her a length of beautiful black silk for a gown. And he was going to write to her, and she was to write to him. She had certainly gained a friend, and one whom she truly loved, through her scheme of vengeance. But the friend was at that moment tearing Italywards through the night, and she was here all alone.

Then, just as Aurelio had arranged it, that artistic stage-manager's sense of fitness having decided on the very minute it was to happen, in came Mr. Brown. Mr. Horace Brown, with a bunch of flowers carefully pinned together in one hand and a rather large parcel in the other.

Little Mrs. Quince was so glad to see him that it was some minutes before she realised that he ought to believe that she was on her way to Italy. She hung his coat up on the nail on the door, side by side—oh, presage!—with her own little mauve dressing-gown, and they sat down by the tiny fire.

She loved the flowers, and put them in

a jug; then he untied the parcel and displayed his more solid offerings.

"I know," he said hesitatingly, "that it is sometimes hard to accustom oneself to a new table, and I remembered your fondness for sardines. I have bought you a few boxes. These," touching another little box, "are dates, stuffed with walnuts."

"My favourite candy," she said. "How wonderful! How did you guess?"

"I didn't guess," said Mr. Brown unwarily. "The Principino told me."

Even then Mrs. Quince didn't realise that he had no business at all to know where she was. And when the final offering, a pair of beautiful shiny goloshes, that exactly fitted her little narrow feet, had been tried on, with rapture she suddenly asked, her face a comical mixture of dismay and delight: "But how did you know I was here?"

"The Principino told me," repeated Mr. Brown.

"Oh, that boy! He—he——"

"My dear Mrs. Quince, I had ventured to hope that you would be glad to see me, at least"—he added a little ponderously—Mr. Brown was perhaps a little on the ponderous side—"that my coming would not be unpleasant to you."

When her excitement had subsided, Mr. Brown explained:

"The Principino waited for me yesterday morning outside the house and explained it all to me."

"My sakes! What a boy, and he never said a word to me about it. How surprised you must have been, Mr. Brown."

Mr. Brown shook his head, and there was a twinkle in his kind eyes. "Well, no, Mrs. Quince, to tell you the truth, I wasn't surprised. I suspected it from the first. And then something in the Principino's voice the night before last confirmed me."

"Of course," faltered Mrs. Quince, "you know that he really isn't the Principino."

"Of course. What is his name?"

And she told him all about the beguiling Aurelio. Unconsciously, as she talked, she told him a great deal about her daughter, and he was very gentle as he listened.

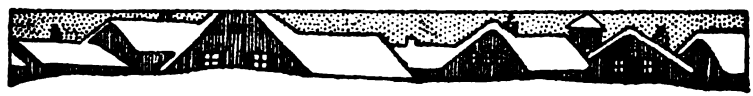
"I think," he said at last, "that I'd try to put her out of my mind entirely if I were you. She seems very heartless."

Mrs. Quince nodded sadly. "Yes, she always was, even as a young girl; but, you see, it was a great chance for her, to marry the Prince. You might not think it," she added, "but we were quite humble folks. My father kept a store out West, and I never had any particular schooling, and when Carrie grew up—her father was dead long before—I drew out all my savings and took her to Italy. She had set her mind on going to Italy, somehow. We lived in a little *pension*, and one day the Prince saw her on the Pincio and followed her home. I can't tell you," the little woman broke out, clasping her hands and flushing, "I can't tell you, and you'd never guess, what it was he thought at first about Carrie and me. But I soon made him see there was only one way for any gentleman to get my Dotter, and he had to take it."

She was silent for a while, and the grey, dull, middle-aged man looked at her as one looks at people who have had great romances in their lives. Presently he rose to go, having promised to tell no one what she called her continued residence in London, and took both her hands in his. "I am going to move, too," he told her. "I don't like No. 3 any more. Would you like me to move somewhere in this neighbourhood?"

Mrs. Quince blushed, and tried to draw her hands away, for she knew quite suddenly that her old friend was going to propose to her. And Mr. Brown did propose to her. It doesn't much matter what he said, but that he did say it mattered so immensely to the tired lonely little expatriate that she cried in his arms for sheer joy. She had always liked him, and now she felt she could really love him—and oh, the beauty and glory of not being brave for a few minutes, and just behaving, as she told herself, like a silly girl! In her excitement and delight she went downstairs with him and herself opened the hall door. Here he kissed her, and then she watched him disappearing sedately into the night.

She ran back upstairs and, opening her purse, counted her money. She had very little; but one thing she would do, "Expense or no expense," she said aloud, "the first thing I'll do to-morrow morning is to send a cablegram to Aurelio."



# Two Hearts That Beat As One

*It is better to have loved and lost——!*

By FRANK NORRIS

"I GUESS," began Hardenberg, "that you never yet heard about that time when Strokher—the Englisher—and Bunt McBride had a friendly go with bare knuckles—ten rounds it was, all because of a young woman.

It is a small earth, and I had just found out that my friend Bunt McBride—horse-wrangler, miner, faro-dealer and bone-gatherer—whose world was the plains and ranges of the great Southwest, was known of the Three Black Crows, Hardenberg, Ally Bazan and Strokher—the Englisher—and had even foregathered with them on more than one of their ventures for Cyrus Ryder's Exploitation Agency—ventures that had nothing of the desert in them, but that involved the sea, and the schooner, and the taste of the great-lunged canorous trades.

"Never heard of that, hey?" repeated Hardenberg.

I professed ignorance.

We were sitting on the stringpiece of a wharf, over in the Oakland Creek—which is not a creek, but an arm of San Francisco Bay—where some fool had told us we could catch striped bass. It was now eleven o'clock, and we had been there since early morning without even the mild diversion of rebaiting the hooks.

Hardenberg reeled up, examined the bait and cast out far into the creek. Then he set the click and laid the rod down beside him.

"Now," he said, doggedly, "bite or bunk—it's all one to me. But I don't propose to dawdle this here buggy whip no longer"—it was my pet eight-ounce split bamboo—"but about Bunt and Strokher, now."

"They fought?"

Hardenberg grunted.

"They sure did," he said, grimly. "Friendly like and all, but keen, keen as pirates."

He took a pinch of tobacco from his pouch and rolled a cigarette in the twinkling of an eye, using only one hand, in true Mexican fashion.

"Now," said he, "I am going to tell you all about that same affair just so as you can get a line on the consuming and devouring dam-foolishness of male humans when there is a woman in the case. Woman," said Hardenberg, wagging his head philosophically, "woman is a weather-breeder. Mister Dixon, there are three things I'm afraid of. I don't just rightly call to mind at this moment what the last two are, but the first is Woman. When I sight Woman bearing down on my course, I put my ship about, Mr. Dixon, without loss of time. And Strokher," he added, irrelevantly, "would have married this woman. Yes, and Bunt would have married her, too, for the matter of that."

"Was there another man?" I asked.

"No," said Hardenberg. Then he began to chuckle behind his moustache. "Yes, they was," he smote a knee. "They sure was another man. You may well say that. Well, now, Mister Dixon, lemme take and tell you the whole 'how.'"

And here follows the "how" of the battle of Strokher and Bunt McBride, as Hardenberg told it to me:

"It began," said Hardenberg, "when I joined in with a scheme that Cy Ryder had gotten up for the Three Crows. There was a row down in Guatemala. Some gazabo named Palachi—Barreto. Palachi—finding times dull and the boys off their feed, ups and says, 'Exercise is what I need. I will now take and overthrow the blame government.' So this same Palachi rounds up a band of *insurrectos* and begins pestering and hectoring the government, and roaring and bellowing, and making a procession of himself, till he regularly pervades the landscape, and before you know what, here's a real live Revolution-thing spoiling the scenery, and the government is plum bothered.

"They rounded up the gazabo at last,

at a place on the coast, but he escapes as easy as how-do-you-do. But he can't get back to his *insurrectos*, the blame government holding possession of all the passes into the hinterland. 'So,' says Palachi, 'what is the matter with me going up to 'Frisco and getting in touch with my financial backers, and conspirating to smuggle down a load of arms?' And this same thing he does. There's where we Three Black Crows come in.

"Cy Ryder gives us the job of taking the schooner down to a certain point on the Guatemala coast and there delivering to the agents of Palachi three thousand stand of 48 Winchesters.

"But when we began to talk details Ryder says, 'Boys, here's where I cashes right in. You set right to me for the schooner and the cargo; but you go to Palachi's agent over here in Berkeley, across the bay, for instructions and directions.'

"But,' says Strokher, the Englisher, 'this blind betting don't suit our hand. Why not make right up to Mister Palachi himself?'

"'No,' Ryder said; 'no, boys, you can't do that. The signor is laying as low as a toad in a wheel-track these days, because of the local police. You must have your palaver with the agent, which,' he says, 'is a woman.' And at that I groaned low and despairing.

"So soon as Ryder says 'Woman' I knew there was trouble in the wind. And right there is where I lost my presence of mind. What I should have said was, 'Mister Ryder, Ally Bazan, Bunt McBride, and gentlemen all: You are good boys, and you deal and drink fair, and I love you all with a love that cannot be uttered; but I am not keeping case on this game any longer. Woman and me is like mules and music. We weren't ever made to ride in the same go-cart. Good-bye.' That's what I should have said. But I didn't. I walked right into the mess like a mud-head that I was, and got mired, just as I might have known I would.

"Ryder gave us the address of this here female agent over in Berkeley, and we four hiked over there in as cruel a rain as ever killed corn. We found the place after a while—a lodging-house, all lorn and loony, set down all by itself in the middle of some real estate extension, like an L. S. station on a sand spit, and rang the bell and asked the party that came to the door if the Signorita Esperanza Ulivarri—that was the name Ryder had given us—was receiving callers that day—and we showed Ryder's note. The party that opened the door was a greaser, the worst-looking I ever clapped eyes on, but he said to come in and to wait '*poco tiempo*.'

"Well, we waited *mucho tiempo—muy mucho*, all sitting on the edge of the sofa in the front parlour, with our hats on our knees, like philly-loo birds on a rail. And Strokher, who was to do the talking, got the fidgets by and by; and because he was only resting the toes of his feet on the floor his knees began jiggering; and along of watching him, *my* knees began to go, and then Butt's, and then Ally Bazan's. And there we sat all in a row and jiggered and jiggered. Great snakes! it makes me sick to the stomach to think what idiots we were.

"Then, after a long time, we heard a rustle of silk petticoats, and we all grabbed hold of one another and looked scared from under our eyebrows, and then—then, Mister Dixon, there walks into that bunk-house parlour the loveliest-looking female woman that ever wore hair.

"She was lovelier than Mary Anderson; she was lovelier than Lotta. She was tall and black-haired, and had an *eye*—— Well, I don't know—but when she gave you one little flicker of that same eye, you felt it was about time to lie right down and say, 'Ma'am, I would esteem it a favour if you were to take and wipe your boots on my waistcoat, just so as you could hear my heart beating.' That's the kind of female woman *she* was.

"Well, when Strokher had caught his second wind, we began to talk business.

"'And you are to take a passenger back with you,' says Esperanza, after a while.

"'What kind might he be?'" asks Strokher.

She fisted out her calling card at that and tore it in two and gave Strokher one half.

"'It's the party,' she says, 'who'll come aboard off San Diego, on your way down, and who will give you the other half of this card—the half I have here—which I am going to mail to him. And you be sure the halves match before you let him come aboard. And when that party *does* come aboard,' she says, 'he is to take charge.'

"'Very good,' says Strokher, mincing and silly, like a chessy-cat lapping cream.

'Very good, ma'm; your orders shall be obeyed.' He sure said it just like that, as if he spoke out of a story-book. And I kicked him under the table for the foolishness of it.

"Then he palavered a whole lot more, and settled a good many preliminaries, and when we'd got as far as we could that day, the signorita up and said:

"'Now, me good fellows'—she spoke in Spanish—'now, me good fellows, you must drink a drink with me.' She herded us out into the dining-room, and brought out—*not* whisky, but a fat green-and-gold bottle of champagne, and when Ally Bazan had fired it off she filled our glasses—dinky little glasses they were, like flower vases. Then she stood up there before us, fine and tall, and all in black silk, and put her glass up high and sung out:

"'To the Revolution!'

"And we, all solemn-like, said 'To the Revolution,' and crooked our elbows.

"When we came to, about half-an-hour later, we were in the street outside, having just said good-bye to the signorita. We were quiet enough the first block or so, and then Bunt McBride says—stopping dead in his tracks: 'I pause to remark that when a young female party having black hair and a killing eye gets good and ready to travel up the centre aisle of a church, I know the gent to show her the way, which he is six-foot-one in his stocking feet, some freckled across the nose, and shoots with both hands.'

"'Which observations,' answered Strokher, twirling his lady-killers, 'have my hearty endorsement and co-operation, saving in the particular of the description of the gent. The gent. to show the way is five-feet-eleven high, three-feet thick, is the only son of my mother, and has a yellow moustache and a buck tooth.'

"'He don't qualify,' put in Bunt; first, because he's a Englisher, and, second, because he's up against an American—and, besides, he has a tooth that is bucked.'

"'Buck or no buck,' flared out Strokher, 'what might be the meaning of that remark concerning being an Englisher?'

"'The fact of this being Englisher,' answered Bunt, 'is only half the hoe-handle; t'other half being the fact that the first-named gent. is all American. No Yank ain't never took no dust from off a Englisher, whether in walking-matches, women or war.'

"'But there's an Englisher,' sung out Strokher, 'not forty mile from here as can nick the nose of a freckled Yank, if so be occasion require.'

"Now, wasn't that foolish-like, of those two gazabos flying up into the air like two he-hens on a hot plate, for nothing in the world except that a neat-looking female woman had flickered a eye at them?

"Well, we others, Ally Bazan and me, gave them some pretty straight talk about being more kinds of a blame fool than a pup with a bug. They simmered down some, but all the way home I could see them glaring at each other, and drawing themselves up, proud-like and presumptuous, and I groaned again, not loud, but deep, as the good book says.

"We had two or three more palavers with the Signorita Esperanza, and slacked the deck to beat down the harbour police, and to nip down the coast with our contraband. And each time we talked with the signorita there were those two locoes stepping and sidling and squeezing her hand under the table, and acting that silly that Ally Bazan and I took and beat our heads against the wall as soon as we were alone, just for pure out-and-out mortification.

## 9

"FINALLY came the last talky-talk, and we were to sail next day, and maybe snatch the little joker through or be took and hung by the *costa guardas*. And 'Good-bye' says Strokher to Esperanza, in a fainting, die-away voice, like a kitten with a cold: 'And ain't we ever going to meet no more?'

"'I sure hopes as much,' put in Bunt McBride, smirking so you would have thought he was a he-milliner selling a bonnet. 'I hope,' says he, 'that our delightful acquaintanceship ain't going to end this way.'

"'Oh, you nice big mister men,' pipes up the signora, in English, 'we will meet down there in Guatemala soon again—yes. Because I go down by the vapour carriages to-morrow.'

"'Unprotected, too,' says Strokher, wagging his fool head. 'Unprotected, and so young.'

"Holy Geronimo! I don't know what more fool drivel they had. But they each kissed Esperanza good-bye, and finally we all got away. Ally Bazan and me rounded them up, and took them to the boat, and

put them to bed as though they were so many kids.

" The next day, about one o'clock in the morning, we let the schooner slip, quiet as may be, and caught the out-tide through the gate of the bay. Lord ! we were keyed up, I can tell you, and Ally Bazan and Bunt were in the bows with drawn and cocked revolvers in case the police boat should come along and ask questions.

" Well, what with this and that, we nipped out with the little jokers—they were down in the manifest as mining pumps—and began to cross the bar.

" Poor Bunt had some trouble just then. You see, this was the first time he had ever gone galleying about on blue water, and when that schooner hit the bar he began to remember his inside arrangements weren't made of chilled steel and rawhide. First, he got regularly sad and shivery, and then he said he felt as poor and mean as a prairie dog that has eaten a horned toad by mistake. He went to Ally Bazan and gave it out that he was going to die, and that he was sure sad and depressed, and hadn't much use for life, anyhow. He said he'd ridden some pretty lively sunfishes in his time, but that for bucking, rearing and general high and lofty tumbling that there boat beat anything in his experience.

" But we sent him below, and had him lay up quiet, and after a while he felt better. By next day he could sit up and take solid food, and straightaway began his everlasting dam - foolishness with Strokher again.

" You would have thought that each of those two mush-heads was trying to act the part of a cow which has lost her calf. They went mooing and mooning about that schooner that mournful it would have made you yell just out of sheer nervousness. First one would up and hold his head in his hand and lean on the rail and sigh till he'd raise his pants clean out the top of his boots. And then the other would go off in another part of the boat, and *he'd* sigh and moon, and take on fit to sicken a seagull.

" When we'd sit down to feed, Strokher would say to Bunt :

" ' Bunt, d'you thinks the signorita will take harm along o' those *Rurales* and government spies ? '

" And Bunt would say back :

" ' Stroke, I don't just rightly know, but I'm doubtful as to how she should 'a' been let go alone. Such a young and byoutifle female girl among them roving bands o' lawless soldiery ! '

" But, by and by, when we were maybe six days to the good of 'Frisco, the two gets kind of sassy with each other, and, at last, they has a heart-to-heart talk, and decides that either one of them would stand a chance to win so only the other was out of the game.

" ' It's double or nothing,' said Bunt, who was something of a card-sharp, ' for either you or me, Stroke ; and if you are agreeable, I'll play you a round of jacks for the chance at the signorita—the loser to pull out of the running for good and all.'

" No, Strokher wouldn't come in on any such game, he said. He'd win her, he said, as a man, and not as a poker player. No, nor he won't throw dice for the chance of winning Esperanza, nor he won't flip a coin, nor yet wrestle.

" ' But,' said he, all of a sudden, ' I'll tell you what I will do. You are a big, thick, strapping hulk of a two-fisted drayhorse, Brunt, and I ain't an *effete* degenerate myself. Here's what I propose —that we lay out a sixteen-foot ring on the quarter-deck of this here boat, and you and me strips to the buff and settles the whole business by Queensberry rules and may the best man win.'

" Bunt looks him over.

" ' And,' says he, ' what might be your weight, Stroke ? I don't figure on hurting you if so be you are below my class.'

" ' I fight at a hundred-and-seventy,' says Strokher.

" ' And me,' answers Bunt, ' at a hundred - and - seventy - five. We're matched,'

" ' Is it a go ? ' asks Strokher.

" ' You bet your great grandmammy's tortis-shell chessy cat it's a go,' says Bunt, quick as a wink.

" We didn't lose any time trying to reason with them, for they were sure set on having the go, and getting the question settled. But Ally Bazan says to me :

" ' This here ain't going to be no bare-knuckle bout, let me tell you, Hardie, for the reason that them two boys ain't fit to die yet ; and if they turn themselves loose on one another with bare knuckles there's going to be a double case of manslaughter on our hands. Did you bring your gauntlets along ? '

" It just happened that I did have them

in my chest, and Bunt he had a pair, too. We got them all out, and Ally Bazan sews a big wad of ravelled rope on to each one and covers the same with oilcloth off the kitchen table. Then we laid out a ring on the quarter-deck and ran the schooner in under the lee of the land and lay her to.

"Then, along about four o'clock on a fine, still day, we resined the ring and says, 'All is ready.'

"Ally Bazan, he's referee and I'm timekeeper, and have to ring the ship's bell every three minutes to let them know to quit and that the round's over.

"We gets them into the ring, each in his own corner, sitting on a bucket, the timekeeper being second to Bunt and the referee second to Strokher. And then, after they've shook hands I climbs up on the chicken coop and rings the bell, and they begins.

¶

"MISTER DIXON, I've seen Tim Heenan at his best, and Sayers when he was a slasher, and also several other pugs and boxers; and I've seen two short-horned bulls arguing about a question of leadership. But, so help me *Bob!* the fight I saw that day made the others look like a young ladies' quadrille. Oh, I ain't going to tell you of that mill in detail, nor yet by rounds. Rounds! There wa'n't any rounds after the first five minutes. I rung the blame bell till I'd rung her loose, and Ally Bazan yelled, 'Break away,' and, 'Time's up,' till he was hoarse, but you could no more separate them two than you could have put the brakes on an earthquake. They made their own rounds. Every now and then they'd pull apart and Bunt maybe would say, all blowing and panting:

"'You're such a good man, Stroke.'

"And Strokher would wipe the hair out of his eyes with the back of his glove and say back, between breaths:

"'You're some willing yourself, Bunt.'

"And then they'd go back at it again till the whole ship trembled.

"At about supper-time we pulled them apart—we could do it by then, they were both so tired, and jammed each one of them down in his corner. I rang the bell good and hard, and Ally Bazan stood up on a bucket in the middle of the ring and said:

"'I declare this here glove contest a draw.'

"And draw it surely was. They'd fought for two hours steady, and never a one got the better of the other. They'd given each other lick for lick as fast and as steady as they could stand to it, wrestling, roughing and boring in, upper-cutting and side-stepping—and both willing to the very last.

"When Ally Bazan called it a draw, they got up and wobbled towards each other and shook hands, and Bunt he said:

"'Stroke, I thanks you a whole lot for as neat a go as ever I mixed into.'

"And Strokher answered up:

"'Bunt, I love you better than ever. You're the first man I've met that I couldn't do, too.'

"And the faces those boys had on them! Well, I guess their mothers might have told them apart. Nobody else could.

"You remember, now, that we were to take on a party at San Diego who was to show the other half of Esperanza's card, and, thereafter to boss the job. Well, we hiked on down to San Diego, and stood off and on till nightfall and there showed two green lights and one white every three and a half minutes for half-an-hour—this being the signal agreed on.

"There was a kind of moon, and we could see pretty well. After we'd signalled about an hour we got the answer—a one-minute green flare, and pretty soon made out a boat coming off. There were two people in her, the boatman and another party sitting in the stern.

"Ally Bazan and me and Strokher and Bunt were all leaning over the side watching, when all at once I up and groaned some sad, the party in the stern of the boat being female.

"'Ain't we never going to get shut of them?' said I. But the words were no more than off my teeth when Strokher piped up with:

"'It's *her!*' and he gasped just as though he'd been shot hard.

"'What,' says Bunt, 'her? Oh, I'm sure a-dreaming,' he says, just that silly like.

"'And the mugs we've got,' says Strokher, and at that they both fell to swearing to beat all I ever heard.

"'I *can't* let her see me so bunged up,' said Bunt; 'oh, whatever-and-which is to be done?'

"'And I,' whimpered Strokher, 'I look like a real genuine blow-in-the-glass pug. But, never mind,' he said, 'we'll tell her these are sure honourable scars got because we fought for her.'

" Well, the boat came up and the female party jumped out and came up the ladder on to the deck. Without saying a word, she handed to Bunt the torn half of the card, and he fished out his half and matched the two by the light of a lantern.

" By this time the rowboat had gone off a little ways. Then, at last, Bunt said :

" ' Welcome aboard, signorita.'

" And Strokher cut in with :

" ' We thought it was to be a man who was to join us here to take command ; but *you*,' he says—and, oh ! sugar wouldn't have melted in his mouth ; ' but *you* are always our mistress.'

" ' Very right, *bueno*, me good fellows,' said the signorita, ' but don't you be afraid that there's no *man* at the head of this business.'

" And with that the party chucks off bonnet and skirt, and *I'll be a Mexican if it wasn't a man, after all !*

" ' I'm the Signor Baretto Palachi, gentlemen,' said he. ' The jingo police made the disguise necessary. Gentlemen, I regret to have been obliged to deceive such gallant *compadres ;* but war knows no law.'

" Bunt and Strokher gave one look at the signor and another at their own spoiled faces. Then :

" ' Come back here with the boat, roared Strokher, and with that—upon me word, you'd have thought the two were both moved with the same spring—over the side they went, into the water, and struck out for the boat as hard as ever they could lay to it.

" The boat met them—God only knows what the boatman thought—they climbed in, and the last I saw of them they were putting for the shore—each taking an oar—and, mister man, they were making that boat *hum*.

" Well, we sailed away without them, and a year or more afterwards I met them in Cy Ryder's office in 'Frisco."

" Did you ask them about it all ?" said I.

" Mister man," observed Hardenberg, " I am several kinds of a damn-fool, I know it. But sometimes I am wise. I want to live as long as I can, and die when I can't help it. I did *not*, neither then nor there-afterward, either make a joke, nor yet any allusion about or concerning the Signorita Esperanza Ulivarri in the hearing of Strokher and Bunt McBride. I've seen —you remember—both those boys use their fists, and, likewise, Bunt, as he says, shoots with both hands."

## *The Wicked Landlord*

MY first impressions of an inn dated from the nursery ; consequently I went back to the nursery for a starting-point, and found myself at the knee of a sallow woman with a fishy eye, an aquiline nose, and a green gown whose specialty was a dismal narrative of a landlord by the roadside, whose visitors unaccountably disappeared for many years, until it was discovered that the pursuit of his life had been to convert them into pies. For the bitter devotion of himself to this branch of industry, he had constructed a secret door behind the head of the bed ; and when the visitor (oppressed with pie) had fallen asleep, this wicked landlord would look softly in with a lamp in one hand and a knife in the other, would cut his throat, and would make him into pies ; for which purpose he had coppers, underneath a trap-door, always boiling ; and rolled out his pastry in the dead of the night. Yet even he was not insensible to the stings of conscience, for he never went to sleep without being heard to mutter " Too much pepper ! " which was eventually the cause of his being brought to justice.

CHARLES DICKENS.

# The Lord of the Dynamos

## *Of A Grim Offering to The Strangest of Gods*

### By H. G. WELLS

THE chief attendant of the three dynamos that buzzed and rattled at Camberwell and kept the electric railway going, came out of Yorkshire, and his name was James Holroyd. He was a practical electrician but fond of whisky, a heavy, red-haired brute with irregular teeth. He doubted the existence of the Deity but accepted Carnot's cycle, and he had read Shakespeare and found him weak in chemistry. His helper came out of the mysterious East, and his name was Azuma-zi. But Holroyd called him Pooh-bah. Holroyd liked a nigger help because he would stand kicking—a habit with Holroyd—and did not pry into the machinery and try to learn the ways of it. Certain odd possibilities of the negro mind brought into abrupt contact with the crown of our civilisation Holroyd never fully realised, though just at the end he got some inkling of them.

To define Azuma-zi was beyond ethnology. He was, perhaps, more negroid than anything else, though his hair was curly rather than frizzy, and his nose had a bridge. Moreover, his skin was brown rather than black, and the whites of his eyes were yellow. His broad cheek-bones and narrow chin gave his face something of the viperine V. His head, too, was broad behind, and low and narrow at the forehead, as if his brain had been twisted round in the reverse way to a European's. He was short of stature and still shorter of English. In conversation he made numerous odd noises of no known marketable value, and his infrequent words were carved and wrought into heraldic grotesqueness. Holroyd tried to elucidate his religious beliefs, and—especially after whisky—lectured to him against superstition and missionaries. Azuma-zi, however, shirked the discussion of his gods, even though he was kicked for it.

Azuma-zi had come, clad in white but insufficient raiment, out of the stoke-hole of the *Lord Clive*, from the Straits Settlements and beyond, into London. He had heard even in his youth of the greatness and riches of London, where all the women are white and fair and even the beggars in the streets are white; and he had arrived, with newly-earned gold coins in his pocket, to worship at the shrine of civilisation. The day of his landing was a dismal one; the sky was dun, and a wind-worried drizzle filtered down to the greasy streets, but he plunged boldly into the delights of Shadwell, and was presently cast up, shattered in health, civilised in costume, penniless, and, except in matters of the direst necessity, practically a dumb animal, to toil for James Holroyd, and to be bullied by him in the dynamo shed at Camberwell. And to James Holroyd bullying was a labour of love.

There were three dynamos with their engines at Camberwell. The two that have been there since the beginning are small machines; the larger one was new. The smaller machines made a reasonable noise; their straps hummed over the drums, every now and then the brushes buzzed and fizzled, and the air churned steadily, whoo! whoo! whoo! between their poles. One was loose in its foundations and kept the shed vibrating. But the big dynamo drowned these little noises altogether with the sustained drone of its iron core, which somehow set part of the ironwork humming. The place made the visitor's head reel with the throb, throb, throb of the engines, the rotation of the big wheels, the spinning ball-valves, the occasional spittings of the steam, and over all the deep, unceasing, surging note of the big dynamo. This last noise was from an engineering point of view a defect, but Azuma-zi accounted it unto the monster for mightiness and pride.

If it were possible we would have the noises of that shed always about the reader as he reads, we would tell all our story to such an accompaniment. It was a steady stream of din, from which the ear picked out first one thread and then another; there was the intermittent snorting, panting,

and seething of the steam-engines, the suck and thud of their pistons, the dull beat on the air as the spokes of the great driving wheels came round, a note the leather straps made as they ran tighter and looser, and a fretful tumult from the dynamos; and, over all, sometimes inaudible, as the ear tired of it, and then creeping back upon the senses again, was this trombone note of the big machine. The floor never felt steady and quiet beneath one's feet, but quivered and jarred. It was a confusing, unsteady place, and enough to send anyone's thoughts jerking into odd zigzags. And for three months, while the big strike of the engineers was in progress, Holroyd who was a blackleg, and Azuma-zi who was a mere black, were never out of the stir and eddy it, but slept and fed in the little wooden shanty between the shed and the gates.

Holroyd delivered a theological lecture on the text of his big machine soon after Azuma-zi came. He had to shout to be heard in the din. "Look at that," said Holroyd; "where's your 'eathen idol to match 'im?" And Azuma-zi looked. For a moment Holroyd was inaudible, and then Azuma-zi heard: "Kill a hundred men. Twelve per cent. on the ordinary shares," said Holroyd, "and that's something like a Gord."

¶

HOLROYD was proud of his big dynamo, and expatiated upon its size and power to Azuma-zi until heaven knows what odd currents of thought that and the incessant whirling and shindy set up within the curly black cranium. He would explain in the most graphic manner the dozen or so ways in which a man might be killed by it, and once he gave Azuma-zi a shock as a sample of its quality. After that, in the breathing times of his labour—it was heavy labour, being not only his own, but most of Holroyd's—Azuma-zi would sit and watch the big machine. Now and then the brushes would sparkle and spit blue flashes, at which Holroyd would swear, but all the rest was as smooth and rhythmic as breathing. The band ran shouting over the shaft, and ever behind one as one watched was the complacent thud of the piston. So it lived all day in this big airy shed, with him and Holroyd to wait upon it; not prisoned up and slaving to drive a ship as the other engines he knew—mere captive devils of the British Solomon—had been, but a machine enthroned. Those two smaller dynamos Azuma-zi by force of contrast despised; the large one he privately christened the Lord of the Dynamos. They were fretful and irregular, but the big dynamo was steady. How great it was! How serene and easy in its working! Greater and calmer even than the Buddhas he had seen at Rangoon, and yet not motionless, but living! The great black coils spun, spun, spun, the rings ran round under the brushes, and the deep note of its coil steadied the whole. It affected Azuma-zi queerly.

Azuma-zi was not fond of labour. He would sit about and watch the Lord of the Dynamos while Holroyd went away to persuade the yard porter to get whisky, although his proper place was not in the dynamo shed but behind the engines, and, moreover, if Holroyd caught him skulking he got hit for it with a rod of stout copper wire. He would go and stand close to the colossus, and look up at the great leather band running overhead. There was a black patch on the band that came round, and it pleased him somehow among all the clatter to watch this return again and again. Odd thoughts spun with the whirl of it. Scientific people tell us that savages give souls to rocks and trees—and a machine is a thousand times more alive than a rock or a tree. And Azuma-zi was practically a savage still; the veneer of civilisation lay no deeper than his slop suit, his bruises, and the coal grime on his face and hands. His father before him had worshipped a meteoric stone; kindred blood, it may be, had splashed the broad wheels of Juggernaut.

He took every opportunity Holroyd gave him of touching and handling the great dynamo that was fascinating him. He polished and cleaned it until the metal parts were blinding in the sun. He felt a mysterious sense of service in doing this. He would go up to it and touch its spinning coils gently. The gods he had worshipped were all far away. The people in London hid their gods.

At last his dim feelings grew more distinct and took shape in thoughts, and at last in acts. When he came into the roaring shed one morning he salaamed to the Lord of the Dynamos, and then, when Holroyd was away, he went and whispered to the thundering machine that he was its servant, and prayed it to have pity on him and save him from Holroyd. As he did so a rare

gleam of light came in through the open archway of the throbbing machine-shed, and the Lord of the Dynamos, as he whirled and roared, was radiant with pale gold. Then Azuma-zi knew that his service was acceptable to his Lord. After that he did not feel so lonely as he had done, and he had indeed been very much alone in London. Even when his work-time was over, which was rare, he loitered about the shed.

The next time Holroyd maltreated him, Azuma-zi went presently to the Lord of the Dynamos and whispered, "Thou seest, O my Lord!" and the angry whirr of the machinery seemed to answer him. Thereafter it appeared to him that whenever Holroyd came into the shed a different note mingled with the sounds of the dynamo. "My Lord bides his time," said Azuma-zi to himself. "The iniquity of the fool is not yet ripe." And he waited and watched for the reckoning. One day there was evidence of short circuiting, and Holroyd, making an unwary examination—it was in the afternoon—got a rather severe shock. Azuma-zi from behind the engine saw him jump off and curse at the peccant coil.

"He is warned," said Azuma-zi to himself. "Surely my Lord is very patient."

Holroyd had at first initiated his "nigger" into such elementary conceptions of the dynamo's working as would enable him to take temporary charge of the shed in his absence. But when he noticed the manner in which Azuma-zi hung about the monster he became suspicious. He dimly perceived his assistant was "up to something," and connecting him with the anointing of the coils with oil that had rotted the varnish in one place, he issued an edict, shouted above the confusion of the machinery, "Don't 'ee go nigh that big dynamo any more, Pooh-bah, or a'll take thy skin off!" Besides, if it pleased Azuma-zi to be near the big machine, it was plain sense and decency to keep him away from it.

Azuma-zi obeyed at the time, but later he was caught bowing before the Lord of the Dynamos. At which Holroyd twisted his arm and kicked him as he turned to go away. As Azuma-zi presently stood behind the engine and glared at the back of the hated Holroyd, the noises of the machinery took a new rhythm and sounded like four words in his native tongue.

It is hard to say exactly what madness is. I fancy Azuma-zi was mad. The incessant din and whirl of the dynamo shed may have churned up his little store of knowledge and big store of superstitious fancy, at last, into something akin to frenzy. At any rate, when the idea of making Holroyd a sacrifice to the Dynamo Fetich was thus suggested to him, it filled him with a strange tumult of exultant emotion.

¶

THAT night the two men and their black shadows were alone in the shed together. The shed was lit with one big arc-light and winked and flickered purple. The shadows lay black behind the dynamos, the ball governors of the engines whirled from light to darkness, and their pistons beat loud and steadily. The world outside seen through the open end of the shed seemed incredibly dim and remote. It seemed absolutely silent, too—since the riot of the machinery drowned every external sound. Far away was the black fence of the yard with grey shadowy houses behind, and above were the deep blue sky and the pale little stars. Azuma-zi suddenly walked across the centre of the shed above which the leather bands were running, and went into the shadow by the big dynamo. Holroyd heard a click, and the spin of the armature changed.

"What are you dewin' with that switch?" he bawled in surprise. "Han't I told you——"

Then he saw the set expression of Azuma-zi's eyes as the Asiatic came out of the shadow towards him.

In another moment the two men were grappling fiercely in front of the great dynamo.

"You coffee-headed fool!" gasped Holroyd, with a brown hand at his throat. "Keep off those contact rings." In another moment he was tripped and reeling back upon the Lord of the Dynamos. He instinctively loosened his grip upon his antagonist to save himself from the machine.

The messenger, sent in furious haste from the station to find out what had happened in the dynamo shed, met Azuma-zi at the porter's lodge by the gate. Azuma-zi tried to explain something, but the messenger could make nothing of the black's incoherent English, and hurried on to the shed. The machines were all noisily at work, and nothing seemed to be disarranged. There was, however, a queer smell of singed hair. Then he saw an odd-looking crumpled mass clinging to the front of the big dynamo,

and, approaching, recognised the distorted remains of Holroyd.

The man stared and hesitated a moment. Then he saw the face, and shut his eyes convulsively. He turned on his heel before he opened them, so that he should not see Holroyd again, and went out of the shed to get advice and help.

When Azuma-zi saw Holroyd die in the grip of the Great Dynamo he had been a little scared about the consequences of his act. Yet he felt strangely elated, and knew that the favour of the Lord Dynamo was upon him. His plan was already settled when he met the man coming from the station, and the scientific manager who speedily arrived on the scene jumped at the obvious conclusion of suicide. This expert scarcely noticed Azuma-zi, except to ask a few questions. Did he see Holroyd kill himself? Azuma-zi explained he had been out of sight at the engine furnace until he heard a difference in the noise from the dynamo. It was not a difficult examination, being untinctured by suspicion.

¶

THE distorted remains of Holroyd, which the electrician removed from the machine, were hastily covered by the porter with a coffee-stained table-cloth. Somebody, by a happy inspiration, fetched a medical man. The expert was chiefly anxious to get the machine at work again, for seven or eight trains had stopped midway in the stuffy tunnels of the electric railway. Azuma-zi, answering or misunderstanding the questions of the people who had by authority or impudence come into the shed, was presently sent back to the stoke-hole by the scientific manager. Of course a crowd collected outside the gates of the yard—a crowd, for no known reason, always hovers for a day or two near the scene of a sudden death in London—two or three reporters percolated somehow into the engine shed, and one even got to Azuma-zi; but the scientific expert cleared them out again, being himself an amateur journalist.

Presently the body was carried away, and public interest departed with it. Azuma-zi remained very quietly at his furnace, seeing over and over again in the coals a figure that wriggled violently and became still. An hour after the murder, to anyone coming into the shed things would have looked exactly as if nothing remarkable had ever happened there. Peeping presently from his engine-room the black saw the Lord Dynamo spin and whirl beside his little brothers, and the driving-wheels were beating round and the steam in the pistons went thud, thud, exactly as it had been earlier in the evening. After all, from the mechanical point of view it had been a most insignificant incident—the mere temporary deflection of a current. But now the slender form and slender shadow of the scientific manager replaced the sturdy outline of Holroyd travelling up and down the lane of light upon the vibrating floor under the straps between the engines and the dynamos.

"Have I not served my Lord?" said Azuma-zi inaudibly from his shadow, and the note of the great dynamo rang out full and clear. As he looked at the big whirling mechanism the strange fascination of it that had been a little in abeyance since Holroyd's death resumed its sway.

Never had Azuma-zi seen a man killed so swiftly and pitilessly. The big humming machine had slain its victim without wavering for a second from its steady beating. It was indeed a mighty god.

The unconscious scientific manager stood with his back to him, scribbling on a piece of paper. His shadow lay at the foot of the monster.

Was the Lord Dynamo still hungry? His servant was ready.

Azuma-zi made a stealthy step forward; then stopped. The scientific manager suddenly ceased his writing, walked down the shed to the endmost of the dynamos, and began to examine the brushes.

Azuma-zi hesitated, and then slipped across noiselessly into the shadow by the switch. There he waited. Presently the manager's footsteps could be heard returning. He stopped in his old position, unconscious of the stoker crouching ten feet away from him. Then the big dynamo suddenly fizzled, and in another moment Azuma-zi had sprung out of the darkness upon him.

The scientific manager was gripped round the body and swung towards the big dynamo. Kicking with his knee and forcing his antagonist's head down with his hands, he loosened the grip on his waist and swung round away from the machine. Then the black grasped him again, putting a curly head against his chest, and they swayed and panted as it seemed for an age or so. Then the scientific manager was impelled

to catch a black ear in his teeth and bite furiously. The black yelled hideously.

They rolled over on the floor, and the black, who had apparently slipped from the vice of the teeth or parted with some ear—the scientific manager wondered which at the time—tried to throttle him. The scientific manager was making some ineffectual efforts to claw something with his hands and to kick, when the welcome sound of quick footsteps sounded on the floor. The next moment Azuma-zi had left him and darted towards the big dynamo. There was a splutter amid the roar.

The officer of the company who had entered stood staring as Azuma-zi caught the naked terminals in his hands, gave one horrible convulsion, and then hung motionless from the machine, his face violently distorted.

"I'm jolly glad you came in when you did," said the scientific manager, still sitting on the floor.

He looked at the still quivering figure. "It is not a nice death to die, apparently—but it is quick."

The official was still staring at the body. He was a man of slow apprehension.

There was a pause.

The scientific manager got up on his feet rather awkwardly. He ran his fingers along his collar thoughtfully, and moved his head to and fro several times.

"Poor Holroyd! I see now." Then almost mechanically he went towards the switch in the shadow and turned the current into the railway circuit again. As he did so the singed body loosened its grip upon the machine and fell forward on its face. The core of the dynamo roared out loud and clear, and the armature beat the air.

So ended prematurely the worship of the Dynamo Deity, perhaps the most short-lived of all religions. Yet withal it could at least boast a Martyrdom and a Human Sacrifice.

## *Delights of Winter*

NO, sir, you cannot deny that the best season of the year is winter. The theatres fill up. Gastronomists return to the juicy oyster; and as soon as it begins to freeze still their appetites with the tasty sea-bream. The crown ministers can infringe the laws with impunity, fearless of tumults and insurrections, for the people's blood does not boil as in the month of July, and patriots prefer roasting chestnuts and toasting themselves over the brazier to haranguing in rain and snow. The shoeblacks dance with joy, for the mud is all in their favour. The doctors make their fortunes with colds and lung diseases. The apothecaries sell cough lozenges to their hearts' content. The maid-servants make a new conquest every day of the Savoyards who cross the Pyrenees to clean out our chimneys and purses with their monkeys and hurdy-gurdies. But besides these and other votaries, who have powerful reasons for liking winter, there are other admirers of this season dubbed *rigorous* by the ignorant vulgar. These devotees are the only really intelligent beings, and nobody will be able to deny they are right, when they patent the advantages of the months of November, December, and January over those of May, June, and July.

The monotony of summer is insipid. The sun shines upon everything with the very same rays. The flowers unceasingly diffuse the identical scent. The country is always green. . . . It is unsupportable, horrible! The votaries of summer say that all this makes the little birds charm with their trills and warbles every heart sensible to the delights of harmony. And we defenders of winter reply, who can compare the feeble song of the timid nightingale to the animated and piercing duets intoned by enamoured cats on our roofs in January?

AYQUALA DE IZCO.

# *Street Scenes at Home and Abroad*

## Old London's Crowded Ways

THE lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the town, the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt and mud, the sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print-shops, the old book-stalls, parsons cheapening books, coffee-houses, steam of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself a pantomime and a masquerade —all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me, without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impels me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much life.

Charles Lamb.

## Paved With Water

VENICE is a wonderfully fine city. The approach to it over the laguna, with its domes and turrets glittering in a long line over the blue waves, is one of the finest architectural delusions in the world. It seems to have—and literally it has—its foundations in the sea. The silent streets are paved with water, and you hear nothing but the dashing of the oars, and the occasional cries of the gondolieri.

Percy Bysshe Shelley.

## Legend of a Crooked Street

THE Rue S. Denis is one of the oldest streets in Paris, and is said to have been first marked out by the track of the saint's footsteps, when, after his martyrdom, he walked along it, with his head under his arm, in quest of a burial place. This legend may account for the crookedness of the street, for it could not reasonably be asked of a headless man that he should walk straight. Nathaniel Hawthorne.

## A Manchester Contrast

SO they went along till they arrived in Berry Street. It was unpaved: and down the middle a gutter forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded. Never was the old Edinburgh cry of *Gardez l'eau!* more necessary than in this street. As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of every description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot . . . It is a pretty sight to walk through a street with lighted shops; the gas is so brilliant, the display of goods so much more vividly shown than by day, and of all shops a druggist's looks the most like the tales of our childhood, from Aladdin's garden of enchanted fruits to the charming Rosamond with her purple jar. No such associations had Barton; yet he felt the contrast between the well-fitted, well-lighted shops and the dim gloomy cellar, and it made him moody that such contrasts should exist. Elizabeth C. Gaskell.

## The Old Fleet Market

FLEET Market, at that time was a long irregular row of wooden sheds and pent-houses, occupying the centre of what is now called Farringdon Street. They were jumbled together in a most unsightly fashion, in the middle of the road; to the great obstruction of the thoroughfare and the annoyance of passengers, who were fain to make their way, as they best could, among carts, baskets, barrows, trucks, casks, bulks and benches, and to jostle with porters, hucksters, waggoners, and a motley crowd of buyers, sellers, pick-pockets, vagrants and idlers. The air was perfumed with the stench of rotten leaves and faded fruit; the refuse of the butchers' stalls, and offal and garbage of a hundred kinds: it was indispensable to most public conveniences in those days, that they should be public nuisances likewise; and Fleet Market maintained the principle to admiration.

Charles Dickens.

DOWN the dark alley a ring of orange light
Glows. God, what leprous tatters of distress,
Droppings of misery, rags of Thy Loveliness
Quiver and heave like vermin, out of the night! . . .

They crowd before the stall's bright altar rail,
Grotesque, and sacred, for that light's brief span,
And all the shuddering darkness cries, "All hail,
Daughters and Sons of Man!"

See, see, once more, though all their souls be dead,
They hold it up, triumphantly hold it up,
They feel, they warm their hands upon the Cup;
Their crapulous hands, their claw-like hands break Bread!

See, with lean faces rapturously aglow
For a brief while they dream and munch and drink;
Then, one by one, once more, silently slink
Back, back into the gulfing mist. They go,

One by one, out of the ring of light!
They creep, like crippled rats into the gloom,
Into the fogs of life and death and doom,
Into the night the immeasurable night.

Alfred Noyes.

## In Time of Plague

THE great street I lived in, which is known to be one of the broadest of all the streets of London, I mean of the suburbs as well as the liberties, all the side where the butchers lived, especially without the bars, was more like a green field than a paved street, and the people generally went in the middle with the horses and carts. It is true that the farthest end, towards Whitechapel church, was not all paved, but even the part that was paved was full of grass also; but this need not seem strange, since the great streets within the city, such as Leadenhall Street, Bishopsgate Street, Cornhill, and even the Exchange itself, had grass growing in them in several places.

Daniel Defoe.

## The Midnight "Corso" of Palermo

As midnight was ringing we got into our carriages and were driven to the Corso, which begins at midnight and takes place in the Via del Cassero. This is the finest street in Palermo, and it runs from end to end of the city, being one mile and a half long from one extremity to the other . . . Let the reader imagine this immense Via Cassero, illuminated from end to end, not merely at the windows, but on those porticoes and wooden pyramids I had already noticed in the daytime; filled from one extremity to the other with the carriages of all the princes, dukes, marquises, counts and barons, with whom the place abounds, and in those carriages the handsomest women of Palermo, in their grand gala dresses; on each side of the roadway two solid hedges of people, concealing under their Sunday clothes the rags of their daily life; gay companies on all the balconies, flags at all the windows, invisible music everywhere, and he will have an idea of what the nocturnal Corso of Santa Rosalia is. Alexander Dumas.

A NIGHT of bustle and gas. I stand
A lonely soul in the busy Strand—
Stirring above, stirring below—
Who all these people? Where do they go

I know not; but, friends, were mine your part,
If, roaming about, you sought a heart,
A gentle heart in a gentle breast,
To cherish, and love you, and give you rest.

You would thrill and tremble with joy and pain,
You would stop, and wander, and stop again,
And muse if the yearning exceed not the kiss,
And if search be not sweeter than finding is.

Richard Garnett.

## In a Suburb of Lisbon

We were driven through the long merry street of Belem, peopled by endless strings of mules—by thousands of gallegos, with water-barrels on their shoulders, or lounging by the fountains to hire—by the Lisbon and Belem omnibuses, with four mules, jingling along at a good pace; and it seemed to me to present a far more lively and cheerful, though not so regular, an appearance as the stately quarters of the city we had left behind us. The little shops were at full work—the men brown, well-dressed, manly and handsome: so much cannot, I am sorry to say, be said for the ladies, of whom, with every anxiety to do so, our party could not perceive a single good-looking specimen all day. The noble blue Tagus accompanies you all along these three miles of busy pleasant streets, whereof the chief charm, as I thought, was its look of genuine business—that appearance of comfort which the cleverest Court-architect never knows how to give. William Makepeace Thackeray.

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# Captain Barney's Blindness

*"We learn to know nothing but what we love"*

## By ARCHIBALD GUTHRIE

IT was on a wonderful night in the Tropics, when the darkness lay like a velvet pall, jewel-strewn because of the blazing, fiery stars, that Captain Barney had his first warning. All day he had been conscious of a queer throbbing ache, that was hardly an ache, across his brow, but had put it down to the heat of the Equatorial sun and the closeness of his room combined. At about ten o'clock he mounted to the navigating bridge, where the third mate held the watch, and took his usual good-night glance about. The *Pathfinder* was behaving well. She trudged steadfastly into the furry blackness, her nose pointed to the horses of The Plough, the Southern Cross hanging overhead like a guarding beacon.

"A good night and fine weather, Mr. Bates," said Captain Barney.

"Yes, sir. Can't have too much of this sort of thing. Pity we've got the Bay to think of after all this. But we're not there yet."

"That's the way to look at things, my lad. You're young. This is your first voyage as officer, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Couldn't wish for a better ship than the old *Pathfinder* to commence in."

"She's not bad, she's not bad, as ships go. Not a liner, not too much brass-work and white paint about her, but she's a safe ship. Well, Bates, my lad, remember this in your after-years: Don't cross your bridges before you come to them. You said just now that the thought of the Bay spoilt this quietness for you. Don't worry. Enjoy the calms, and wait till the storms come. They won't keep you waiting long, but until they're with you ignore them."

"Yes, sir."

"I've always done it myself, my lad. Isn't that a light out there to starboard?"

"No; I don't see anything, sir." Bates searched the starboard horizon with keen young eyes through binoculars, but there was nothing to be seen.

"Ah, a flash of phosphorescence, likely. Well, as I was saying, in my fifty-odd years of life, I've always taken the good that came, and thanked my Maker for it. Then, when the evil did come—I'm almost certain that was a light to port. There's another. Good Heavens! it must be a fleet of ships; some foreign navy, likely, out for practice."

"There's nothing at all, sir. No lights, and there isn't much phosphorescence, either. Everything's quite dark, sir."

"It's funny. I could have sworn—but there's nothing now. Hello! I wouldn't let the look-out man light his pipe when he's on watch."

Bates looked quickly at the skipper and shook his head. What his thoughts were only Bates knew, and he was not the man to speak unnecessarily.

"I know he hasn't been drinking," he said angrily to himself, as though ashamed of the thought; "but I wonder what's wrong. I'd better humour him, though." He whistled shrilly, and a sailor came.

"Tell the look-out man not to smoke on watch," he said sharply.

Presently the man came back. "It's Smith, sir. He doesn't smoke."

Captain Barney shook his head slowly when he heard the sailor's voice.

"It's strange. I could have sworn I saw a match struck there on the forecastle head. Must be fancy. I wish my head didn't ache so much. Well, I think I'll go and lie down. Call me if you see anything out of the ordinary, Mr. Bates."

"Yes, sir. Good night, sir." Bates resumed his soft, steady tramp of the bridge, scanning either side alertly as he turned. He thought how decently old Barney treated him, and what a jolly good ship the *Pathfinder* was.

"Rattling good sort, old Barney," he said as he walked. "But it was dashed strange his seeing those lights. Why, there's never a ship to be seen down here."

He mentioned Barney's imagination to the

second mate when he relieved at midnight; but Strong was sleepy, and merely grunted out the course given him.

"Nor'-nor'-east, ay, ay. Good night, mister."

Captain Barney heard the soft pad-pad of the third mate's feet as he left the bridge. He had been trying for over an hour to find sleep, but it would not come at his call. The room was oppressive. He unscrewed another port, and readjusted his windsail, took a drink of water from the chattie outside his door, and lay down again. But it was tremendously strange—the darkness of the room had given place to wheels and flashes of brilliant fire! They were everywhere: now darting out of corners, now dancing merrily immediately in front of his staring eyes.

"You must be bilious, Barney, lad," he said. "If only this headache would stop, you'd be better. Pure hallucination."

He looked carefully about him when he came on deck at breakfast-time. So far as he could tell, the hallucination of the night before had gone; the headache was more of a gnaw than an ache.

"I'll take a blue pill," he said, and went to the medicine chest. Then he remembered that one of the sailors had spoken of feeling poorly, and had described his symptoms at length. Instinctively—he was all but a father to his men—he took out the blue-covered book and read the medical directions. The print stood out boldly, though there was one place where a bottle of laudanum had been broken over the book in byegone times, and the red-rusty stain showed still.

"All imagination," he said, thinking of the past night. "But it was funny. This print stands out as clear as day. That's a smudge I hadn't noticed before, though." He had turned a page, and the familiar leaf displayed a significant smudge.

He brushed it away with an impatient finger, saw it vanish, and looked again. The smudge was still there! He concentrated his gaze on the spot and rubbed reflectively. But a strange phenomenon occurred. The smudge was not on the white page at all. It was between his eyes and his finger.

"I can't understand it," he said in some bewilderment. "I'll take that pill at once."

He was almost afraid to go to the bridge the next night for fear lest the hallucination should return. But with gritted teeth he climbed up towards six bells, and gazed over the black expanse of sea. He saw nothing out of the common, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"It must have been bile," he said to Bates, "that imagining I saw lights last night."

"Must have been, sir." Bates looked at him pityingly.

"You know"—Barney's voice had the slightest suspicion of a quaver—"I half thought for one minute that my sight might be failing. But I couldn't very well go crossing bridges before I came to them, after what I told you last night, could I?"

"Not very well, sir. Feeling better now, Captain Barney?"

"Yes; the headache's gone. Hello!——" He checked the exclamation and looked again.

"First time I ever saw fog down in these seas, Mr. Bates."

"The night's as clear as glass, sir."

"Oh, is it? Must have been the bile reasserting itself. Well, I won't give it another chance. Good night, my lad. Keep a clear lookout in case it should be fog."

He slept better this night, for the headache did not return. Then for a fortnight he saw clearly, but on the fifteenth day he watched a thin veil of mist lift itself from the sea, and rubbed his eyes. When he looked again the mist was still there, but after a moment it curled up from one corner, vanished into space, and returned again!

"This is getting beyond a joke," said Captain Barney. "I'll look into this when the old ship reaches port." And during the rest of the voyage he kept himself well in hand, though each day showed more fog, which was filled with weird, unusual lights from every point of the compass. He almost deserted the bridge during the last week, and said that doubt was better than grim certainty.

## II

"H'M, yes, just so. I quite understand, captain. A slight headache. Yes, yes. Let me look at you. Stand there, please. Fine eyes you've got. Must have looked over some thousand miles of sea. flashes of fire at times? Yes; imagined you saw lights? Er—you didn't happen to think a fog was coming down, when in reality the sky was quite clear?"

Barney gasped in surprise.

"I've thought so a dozen times this last week, doctor."

"Yes, yes. You've a fine thatch of hair there. Wish I had your recipe against baldness. What's this scar here?" The garrulous physician was running slim, white fingers through the iron-grey thatch that clustered over Barney's forehead.

"That—let me see, sir. Oh, yes. It happened when I was but a lad; second mate of a sailing ship, and she carried away her main royal yard. I was out on the weather earring of the topsail when it came down, and it caught me slanting. But I'd forgotten—it must be thirty years ago at the least."

"Ay, ay. Drew blood?"

"I was unconscious for a week."

"Indeed. It would have killed many men. Well, Captain Barney, what do you think of the pattern on this white card. Tasteful, isn't it?" He had brought out an absolutely blank sheet of pasteboard that was as white as snow.

"I don't call that pattern tasteful, doctor. It runs unevenly. A lot of dots, that seem to move all over the card."

Then, suddenly, his eyes searching the doctor's face, Captain Barney felt grim, hopeless fear clutch at his heart.

"The card's blank, doctor!"

"I know, I know. How shall I put it plainly to you, captain?"

"Go ahead, sir. I'm not a coward. Is it very bad?"

"As bad as it can be, I'm afraid. Yes; the optic nerve's the cause of the trouble. That blow on the head must have worked in slowly. Complete decay, and——"

"And—what, doctor?"

"Total blindness within a year, my friend."

"Can nothing be done. I'm not whining; but it means the sea's lost to me, sir. A specialist——"

"God help you, captain. A specialist could only confirm my verdict. There, sit down and gather yourself together. Take a drink of this." But Barney waved the proffered tumbler aside.

"That won't do any good, sir. I ought to have been prepared; but you'll understand when I tell you I've followed the sea a matter of forty-five years, and it's more than life to me. Would glasses stop it?"

"No. It will get worse day by day, and then—blackness. But you will take it standing up, I know."

"Ay, ay, sir. The day seems closing in for rain." Now the sun was shining in at the window, and the doctor knew it, but he agreed with the suggestion.

"Ay; I'll buy me a terrier dog, and a tow-rope, and we'll steer clear of collision somehow," muttered the old sea-dog. "Blind! My God! after all these years."

An ordinary man might have hidden the fact and concealed his growing blindness from his shipowners, but old Barney was the soul of honour. He might easily have made another voyage, and none been the wiser, but he turned into the street that held his owners' offices with a firm determination to tell the truth.

"Going blind, Captain Barney! Dear, dear! That's terrible. We can't afford to lose our best captain."

"That's kindly, Mr. Harry."

The junior partner was still Mr. Harry, though Mr. Dowells had been dead for twenty years. "But it wouldn't be fair to hide it. There are men's lives to be considered, sir. So I'll have to—hand in my—my resignation." It was like tearing out his heart by the roots, but he did it, with compressed lips and tightly-clutched fingers

"Pooh, nonsense! What's your own motto, captain? Don't cross your bridges before you come to them, isn't it? Very well, then. So long as you can see at all, there's no other man will occupy the *Pathfinder's* captain's room. Yes; you're retained in your command for another voyage, at all events. Now, what about that charter to the Cape? We must look into it." Talk drifted into purely nautical channels after this, and Barney almost forgot the impending shadow. But all through the succeeding voyage the blindness grew, and when at last the *Pathfinder* steamed up the Channel and edged through the Straits, the first mate was practically in charge. Captain Barney was enveloped in a blackness as of night.

## III

HE had managed to stick it out for six months—during the entire voyage, in fact. The day the *Pathfinder* sailed for the first time without him, he got his one old servant to lead him down to the dock, and he smelt the keen salt air with considerable regret. He could tell by his sense of hearing exactly what was toward aboard his old ship, could hear the ringing of the engine-room telegraph, the hoarse rattle of the

anchor chain as it was slipped. He even heard the rumble of a hove-in heaving-line aft, and he started as Bates, now promoted to second, hailed him by name.

"Good-bye, sir. Buck up. We'll miss you awfully, sir." Barney waved a hand in the direction of the sound, and something hot and wet forced itself between his eyelids. Then, quite firmly, with squared shoulders and thrown-back head, he rose from the bollard on which he had been seated and walked home.

"Now for that dog," he said grimly. "Good-bye to the sea."

For the first three months he held himself sternly back from the docks even, lest the familiar sounds should fill him with an unconquerable regret. But he could not hold aloof for ever, and gradually the tall, slightly-bent form became as familiar to dock-side workers as the giant crane itself. He timed each ship's departure by some extra sense that had come to him, enabling him to know by mere sounds exactly how she fared as to her cargo.

Fellow captains, touched by pity, led him aboard their ships and took him from place to place, explaining the beauties of maple panelling and teak-wood beadings. His lithe fingers followed the captain's lead, and gradually he grew to rely on those same trusty fingers, which had now to serve him as eyes. And then one day he heard a familiar hooting in the direction of the bar, and his whole frame quivered with expectancy.

"What ship's that that's hooting?" he asked a wharfinger.

"The *Pathfinder*, captain—your old ship."

"Ay, ay. I needn't have asked. Trust me to know her foghorn as I know every foghorn from Start to Leith. So she's back, is she?"

He waited impatiently for the ship to dock, and he was the first man to cross the gang-plank. Bates met him, and piloted him carefully to the upper bridge, where he explained everything about the ship, the changes wrought by the new captain.

"But, between you and me, sir, Captain White's not quite sure of himself—a bit nervous."

"Ay, that's likely. But none of that, my boy. An officer should be above speaking of his captain behind his back. It makes for unpleasantness. Now, what were you saying about the chronometers?"

But three days constantly visiting the *Pathfinder* brought to him a gnawing unrest that he could fight against no longer.

"I'm going to find a quiet spot in the country, out of sound of the sea, Mr. Harry," he explained to the shipowner. "The sound of it makes it hard to bear. I can't reconcile myself to being a sheer hulk."

"Don't, captain. You'd be more miserable than ever. Why, here's the very thing. You wouldn't take that pension we offered you, but what's to hinder you taking it out in kind? Go a voyage on the old *Pathfinder* as passenger. You're welcome to it. Go as many voyages as you like."

It was arranged thus. Captain Barney had his traps conveyed aboard the *Pathfinder*, he was signed on as fourth mate, and a room abutting on the saloon was given over to him exclusively.

He never intruded upon the rightful captain. He knew how the younger man would resent his interference, and held sternly aloof, offering no comments, tendering no advice, though he felt within himself that sense of ill-being that your tried sailor knows when the ship he sails on is not under absolute command.

Captain Barney was purely happy. This voyage the *Pathfinder* went East, and the old man had all the joys that life could give him. Sweltering through Suez, bucketing against the monsoon, inhaling the wonderful compound of smells that spells the East, he was happy. He rejoiced at the noisy life of Hong Kong harbour, and when the ship left that place and strode along to Sydney, he filled up every moment of his spare time in calling up sightless visions of the wonderful sweep of water, island-decked and radiant. He met friends everywhere. Skippers of sailing ships would order away their boats as soon as they heard the old veteran was again aboard the *Pathfinder*, and drag Barney to their ships that they might reflect on vanished glories that the sea once held. Altogether the voyage was full of quiet happiness; but all things must end, and the East was left behind. Magellan Straits gave them a boisterous welcome, the tropics blazed down upon them brazenly, and Biscay seemed delighted to give the old warrior as much as he could have wished for. This was his great delight. Clad in time-worn oilskins, sea-booted, sou'-westered, he faced the gale for hour after stupendously glorious hour, and the sizzling hiss of the spindrift on his face

was like the caress of an old, well-loved friend.

They reached the Start in a momentary clearance, and wafted a signal ashore. Almost immediately an answer was returned. It was urgent in the extreme : the *Pathfinder* was ordered to make all possible speed up Channel and reach her port without a moment's loss of time, for a rich freight was offering, failure to carry which meant great loss to the steamer's owners.

" Owners haven't any business to engage themselves for freights at this time of the year," grumbled Captain White. " With clear weather we might just manage by Wednesday, but if the fog settles down we're done."

" Perhaps it will keep clear," suggested Barney soothingly, though his extra sense told him that it was a false prophecy. He knew the Channel too well. To Bates he said : " This fog is going to thicken still more ; and you'll find the wind has banked it up in the North Sea so that you won't be able to see the number two hatch from the thwart-ship bunker."

" Then that will be a bad lookout for White," said Bates thoughtfully. " They aren't over-pleased with him at the office, and if he runs them into a big sum for failing to fulfil their contract he'll get the sack. Well, he's brought it on himself."

Captain Barney grew very thoughtful after hearing this. He had not met with the most courteous treatment from the real skipper of the *Pathfinder*. But he seemed to see that White was labouring under a combination of evils, and he was very lenient with others' failings.

Somehow they managed to scramble up past Dungeness, and then groped into the narrow Straits ; but once there the fog became doubly solid. The *Pathfinder*, under easy steam, barely kept steerage-way, and all about her the bewildered craft of the seven seas kept up a pandemonium of frightened bleatings.

" I'm a ruined man," said White dolefully. His voice was shaking, his eyes were red-rimmed. " They'll fire me out as sure as fate if I don't get home in time. If I could get a look in at the sun I wouldn't care so much but how am I to know whether that westerly current won't set her hard down on the land ? "

" It runs pretty strongly at this time of the year," said Barney. " I'm sorry for you, captain. I hate to criticise too much, but there's more than enough reliance on sun and stars these times. What a man needs is a good coast experience. A master mariner ought to be able to find his way blindfolded from the South Foreland to the Tyne. Still, I hope, for your sake, the fog will clear."

¶

WHITE was very near his limit of endurance by this, for four days on a fog-hemmed bridge, with nerves on edge and eyes strained to bursting, play the very mischief with a man's stamina. He could have wept as another night drew down and showed the ship in a yellow mystery of fog that blanketed her about like wool.

Bates opened out his heart to his lawful skipper during the middle watch that night.

" There's a man aboard this ship, sir," he said, " who could take the old tank along through the crash of Judgment Day, and even then make his port. Why don't you get him to give you a hand ? "

" I'm skipper here," replied White, with some shreds of his pitiful dignity still remaining ; " and, by Gad ! so long as I'm able to stand a watch, I'll be skipper." But when four o'clock came, his over-tried nerves gave way, and he broke down.

It was Bates who roused out Barney, who was sleeping like a lamb.

" Better give us a hand, sir," he suggested. " We're in bad case ; and it would be hard lines on White to lose his billet now." Barney groped for his clothes, using his new-found sense in the search. Five minutes later he was on deck. He put out his hands and climbed slowly to the bridge, made his way to the weather corner, and there heard White whimpering like a woman.

" I know how a master resents interference by an outsider, captain," he said ; " but if my experience is of any use to you, it's at your service."

" There's no man living can take this ship through until it clears ! " cried White, still tenacious of his pride. " The sea's lurking full of dangers, and they're increasing every minute."

" I'd like to help you, captain. You see—being—blind, it makes very little difference, this fog. If you'd be good enough to accept my assistance, I'd take it as a great favour."

White climbed down ungracefully.

" She might as well run ashore now as

later on," he grunted. "Anyhow, I'm done."

"Then, I take it——"

"Oh, yes. It's ruin whichever way I look, but if you care to try your hand, I shan't interfere."

Captain Barney drew himself erect. The pride of command came back to his wearied soul, he cocked his ears thoughtfully.

"I'll do my best," he said. "That will be the Outer Goodwin there. Very well, half a mile away, I make it. I've got my position. Now, Mr. Bates, put the hands on calashee watches, and get up another deep-sea leadline. Never mind the Thomson sounder aft—it's new-fashioned, and I'm old. Pass the two leads along forward, get steam on to the winches. We'll keep going with running casts, and, since I'm going to put her through full speed, we'll need all our resources. You've got till Wednesday afternoon, I think you said, captain?"

"Yes; but there isn't a man on God's wide sea could make port by then. We're two days and a half behind already."

Captain Barney smiled. He saw no fog; he knew the road to a hair's breath. His ears were better far than eyes in that fog; his sense of direction was a very real thing.

"Ring full speed ahead, please," he said. Then the steamer throbbed throughout her length, and the freedom of swift movement came to her as she leaped boldly at a solid yellow wall that split before her advance, only to close in again impregnably. And all the time Captain White, white-faced and trembling, clung to the rails and wondered at what was toward.

Men came scampering out of the gloom and presented dripping sounding-leads to Captain Barney. He fingered them with quick finger-tips, smelt them, tasted them, and smiled in satisfaction. The old instincts were holding good again: he knew just where that evil-smelling, gritty mud lay on the sea's bed. Every jagged shell that came up on the tallow arming of the leads was a familiar friend to him. The faint bleatings that came to him from the landward side were like the welcoming voices of old-time chums; and when a peculiar wheezy scream split the thickness, as the yellow thinned before the day, he smiled.

"That's old Morris's smack, the *Hurry Up*," he said. "I know her whistle in a hundred. Yes, I'm not so far out. She's making up for Yarmouth. Now, we'll alter the course three degrees to the east, because there's a bit of a current here that might drift us down on the land before we know where we are. Then, in two hours, we'll haul in again, for there'll be open water for a few hours. After that—well, I think I know the road."

It was purely marvellous to see the grand old hero as he stood there on the bridge. He had cast aside his sou'-wester for the sake of leaving his ears free for every passing sound, and a slight wind blew his long white hair over his shoulders.

Wednesday morning came, and with it thicker fog than ever; but by this Barney was on the threshold of his home. He knew every whisper of every wave; he could have given a name to every blaring ship that surged past unseen in the darkness; he knew the varied smells that came to him from the distant shore.

"In twenty minutes more," he said, "we ought to hear the Inner Clushings' lightship."

Nineteen and a half minutes after he spoke—Bates timed it—the long-short-long-short roar smote on their ears.

"We'll let off a signal for a pilot," said Captain Barney. "I think we're home."

They made it with two hours to spare, and White retained his command. But, shamefacedly, he drew Mr. Dowells aside on the evening of their arrival and told him the truth.

"Blind, is he?" said Dowells. "It seems to me that he's better than most men with two pairs of eyes. Wouldn't you like to carry him as a regular passenger, Captain White?"

"It would be better than a double insurance," was the reply. And Captain Barney, hearing the news, smiled well content. He was not to be parted from the sea he loved so well; he saw a vista of many useful years.

# Vanina Vanini

*"With women the heart argues, not the mind"*

## By STENDHAL

**Stendhal, whose real name was Henri Marie Beyle, is now acknowledged to have been one of the most penetrating novelists of the nineteenth century. As a short story writer he was no less successful in displaying his gift of psychological insight. He died in 1843.**

ONE evening in the spring of 182- all Rome was in a stir: the Duke of B——, the famous banker, was giving a ball at his new palace in the Piazza Venezia. The utmost magnificence that the arts of Italy and the luxury of Paris and London could produce had been brought together to embellish the palace. The throng was immense. The blonde, reserved beauties of noble England had solicited the honour of being present at this ball; they arrived in crowds. The handsomest women in Rome disputed the prize of beauty with them. A young girl, whom the brilliance of her eyes and her ebon hair proclaimed a Roman, entered escorted by her father, all eyes followed her. A singular pride shone in all her movements.

The strangers as they entered were visibly impressed by the magnificence of the ball. "None of the fêtes of the kings of Europe comes anywhere near this," they said.

The kings have not a palace of Roman architecture: they are obliged to invite the great ladies of their courts; the Duke of B—— only invites pretty women. That evening he had been happy in his invitations; the men seemed dazzled. Among so many remarkable women the difficulty was to decide who was the handsomest. The choice for some time remained undecided; but at last the Princess Vanina Vanini, the young girl with the black hair and the eye of fire, was proclaimed queen of the ball. At once the strangers and the young men of Rome, abandoning all the other saloons, formed a crowd in the one where she was.

Her father, Prince Asdrubale Vanini, had wished her to dance first with two or three German sovereigns. After that she accepted the invitations of some Englishmen, very handsome and very noble; their air of solemnity wearied her. She evidently found more pleasure in tormenting young Livio Savelli, who seemed deeply in love. He was the most magnificent young man in Rome, and, what was more, he too was a prince; but, if you had given him a novel to read, he would have thrown the volume away after twenty pages, saying that it gave him a headache. That was a disadvantage in Vanina's eyes.

About midnight a piece of news spread through the ball and produced a great stir. A young carbonaro, who had been confined in the Castle of Sant' Angelo, had just escaped that very night by means of a disguise; and, with an excess of romantic daring, on arriving at the last ward of the prison, he had attacked the soldiers with a poniard; but he himself had been wounded; the police were tracking him through the streets by his blood, and they hoped to find him.

As this anecdote was being told, Don Livio Savelli, dazzled by the graces and the triumphs of Vanina, with whom he had just been dancing, said to her as, almost beside himself with love, he led her back to her place:

"But, really, who could please you?"

"That young carbonaro who has just escaped," Vanina answered him; "he at least has done something more than take the trouble of being born."

Prince Don Asdrubale came up to his daughter. He was a rich man, who for the last twenty years had not taken reckoning with his steward, who lent him his own revenues at a very high rate of interest. If you met him in the street, you would have taken him for an old actor; you would not have observed that his hands were ornamented with five or six enormous rings set with big diamonds. His two sons had

become Jesuits and afterwards died insane. He had forgotten them; but he was vexed that his only daughter Vanina would not marry. She was now nineteen, and had refused the most brilliant matches. What was her reason? The same as Sulla's for abdicating: *her contempt for the Romans.*

The day after the ball, Vanina noticed that her father, the most careless of men, who had never in his life taken the trouble to carry a key, very carefully shut the door of a little stair which led to some rooms on the third floor of the palace. The windows of these rooms looked on to a terrace adorned with orange-trees. Vanina went to pay some visits in Rome; on her return, the main entrance of the palace was blocked by the preparations for an illumination, so the carriage went in by the courts at the back. Vanina looked up, and saw to her astonishment that one of the windows of the rooms which her father had shut with such care was open. She got rid of her companion, climbed to the top of the palace, and searched about until she found a little grated window, which gave a view of the terrace ornamented with orange-trees. The open window that she had noticed was close beside her. That room must certainly be occupied; but by whom? Next day, Vanina managed to obtain the key of a little door which opened on to the terrace ornamented with orange-trees.

She stealthily approached the window, which was still open. A sun-shutter helped to cover it. Inside the room was a bed and someone in the bed. Her first impulse was to withdraw; but she caught sight of a woman's dress thrown on a chair. Looking more closely at the person in the bed, she saw that she was fair and apparently very young. She had no more doubt about its being a woman. The dress thrown down on the chair was stained with blood; there was blood on the woman's shoes, too, laid on a table. The stranger moved; Vanina perceived that she was wounded. A large cloth, spotted with blood, covered her breast; the cloth was only kept on with ribbons; it was no surgeon's hand that had fixed it so. Vanina noticed that every day, about four o'clock, her father shut himself up in his room, then went to see the stranger; he soon came downstairs again, and took the carriage to visit the Countess Vitteleschi. Immediately he had gone, Vanina climbed up to the little terrace from which she could see the stranger. Her feelings were actively excited in favour of this most unfortunate young woman; she tried to guess at her adventure. The blood-stained dress thrown on a chair seemed to have been pierced with dagger-thrusts. Vanina could count the rents. One day she saw the stranger more distinctly: her blue eyes were gazing towards heaven; she seemed to be praying. Soon tears filled her lovely eyes; the young princess could scarcely refrain from speaking to her. The next day Vanina summoned up courage to hide herself in the little terrace before her father arrived. She saw Don Asdrubale go into the stranger's room; he carried a little basket containing provisions. The prince seemed to be disturbed and did not say much. He spoke so low that, although the sash of the window was open, Vanina could not make out what he said. He went away immediately.

"The poor woman must have some very terrible enemies," said Vanina to herself, "that my father, who is usually so careless, dares not trust anybody, and takes the trouble of climbing a hundred-and-twenty steps every day."

One evening when Vanina softly advanced her head in the direction of the stranger's window, she met her eyes, and all was discovered. Vanina fell on her knees, and exclaimed:

"I love you; I am at your service!"

The stranger signed to her to come in.

"I owe you many apologies!" exclaimed Vanina. "How offensive my foolish curiosity must seem to you! I swear secrecy, and, if you insist on it, I shall never return."

"Who would not be happy to see you?" said the stranger. "Do you live in this palace?"

"Of course," replied Vanina; "but I see you do not know me; I am Vanina, Don Asdrubale's daughter."

The stranger looked at her in astonishment, blushed deeply, and then added:

"Permit me to hope that you will come and see me every day; but I should like the prince not to know of your visits."

Vanina's heart beat fast; the stranger's manners seemed to her full of distinction. This poor young woman had no doubt offended some powerful person. Had she, perhaps, in a moment of jealousy, killed her lover? Vanina could not conceive of a commonplace reason for her misfortune. The stranger told her that she had received a wound in the shoulder, which had

penetrated to her chest and was causing her much suffering. She often found her mouth full of blood.

" Yet you have no surgeon ? " exclaimed Vanina.

" You are aware," said the stranger, " that at Rome the surgeons have to give the police an exact report of all the wounds that they treat. The prince condescends to bind up my wounds with his own hands in the cloth which you see."

With the most perfect grace, the stranger avoided any bemoaning over her accident; Vanina loved her to madness. One thing, however, astonished the young princess greatly, namely that, in the middle of a conversation which was certainly serious enough, the stranger had great difficulty in suppressing a sudden desire to laugh.

" I should be happy," said Vanina, " to know your name."

" They call me Clementine."

" Well, dear Clementine, to-morrow at five o'clock I'll come and see you."

Next day, Vanina found her new friend very ill.

" I want to get a surgeon to you," said Vanina, embracing her.

" I would rather die," said the stranger. " Why should I wish to compromise my benefactors ? "

" The surgeon to Monsignore Savelli-Catanzara, the governor of Rome, is the son of one of our servants," Vanina replied eagerly; " he is devoted to us, and, in his position, is afraid of no one. My father does not do justice to his fidelity; I am going to send for him."

" I don't want any surgeon," the stranger exclaimed, with a sharpness which surprised Vanina. " Come and see me; and, if God must call me to Himself, I shall die happy in your arms."

Next day, the stranger was still worse.

" If you love me," said Vanina, as she left her, " you'll see a surgeon."

" If he comes, my happiness is gone."

" I'm going to send for one," replied Vanina.

Without a word, the stranger detained her and took her hand, which she covered with kisses. There was a long silence; the stranger's eyes were full of tears. At last she let go Vanina's hand, and, with the air with which she might have gone to her death, said to her:

" I have a confession to make to you. The day before yesterday I told you a lie when I said I was Clementine; I am an unfortunate carbonaro ——"

Vanina, astonished, pushed back her chair and stood up at once.

" I am aware," continued the carbonaro, " that this confession will cause me to lose the only good thing that attaches me to life; but it is unworthy of me to deceive you. I am called Pietro Missirilli; I am nineteen years old; my father is a poor surgeon at Sant' Angelo in Vado, for my part I am a carbonaro. Our lodge was surprised; I was brought, in chains, from Romagna to Rome. Buried in a dungeon lighted night and day by a lamp, I passed thirteen months there. A charitable soul conceived the idea of rescuing me. They dressed me in women's clothes. As I was coming out of prison and was passing the warders at the last door, one of them cursed the carbonari; I gave him a slap. I assure you that this was not a piece of vain bravado, but simply thoughtlessness. Pursued through the streets of Rome at night after this imprudence, wounded with bayonets, fast losing my strength, I rushed up the stairs of a mansion, the door of which was open; I heard the soldiers coming up after me; I sprang into the garden; I fell down only a few paces from a woman who was walking there."

" The Countess Vitteleschi, my father's friend ! " said Vanina.

" What ! Has she told you ? " exclaimed Missirilli. " In any case, the lady, whose name must never be uttered, saved my life. As the soldiers came into her house to seize me, your father took me out of it in his carriage. I feel very ill; for some days this bayonet-wound in my shoulder has prevented me from breathing. I am going to die, in despair, too, because I shall not see you again."

Vanina had listened with impatience; she went out hastily: Missirilli could discover no pity in her fine eyes; only the expression of a haughty character which had been wounded.

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AT night, a surgeon appeared; he was alone. Missirilli was in despair; he feared that he would never see Vanina again. He questioned the surgeon, who bled him and gave him no answer. The succeeding days, the same silence. Pietro's eyes never left the terrace-window by which Vanina had been accustomed to enter: he was very

unhappy. Once, about midnight, he thought he saw someone in the shadow on the terrace: was it Vanina?

Vanina came every night to press her cheek against the young carbonaro's window-panes.

"If I speak to him," she said to herself, "I am lost! No, I must not see him again!"

Having taken this resolution, she recalled, in spite of herself, the fondness which she had conceived for the young man when she so foolishly took him for a woman. And now, after so sweet an intimacy, she must forget him! In her more reasonable moments, Vanina was terrified at the change which had taken place in her thoughts. Since Missirilli had named himself, all the things she had been accustomed to think about were as if covered with a veil, and seemed very far away.

A week had not passed before Vanina, pale and trembling, entered the young carbonaro's room with the surgeon. She came to tell him that the prince must be made to promise to let a servant take his place. She did not remain ten seconds; but some days afterwards she came back again with the surgeon, out of humanity. One night, though Missirilli was much better and Vanina had no longer the excuse of fearing for his life, she ventured to come alone. Nothing could exceed Missirilli's happiness at seeing her, but he thought to conceal his love; above all, he did not wish to forget the dignity of a man. Vanina, who had come to his room covered with blushes and afraid she would have to listen to words of love, was disconcerted by the noble and devoted, but far from tender, friendliness with which he received her. She went away without his trying to detain her.

Some days after, when she returned, the same conduct, the same assurances of respectful devotion and eternal gratitude. So far from having to put a curb on the young carbonaro's transports, Vanina asked herself if she alone was in love. This young girl, till then so proud, bitterly felt the extent of her folly. She affected gaiety, even coldness, came less often, but could not bring herself to cease seeing the young invalid.

Missirilli, burning with love, but remembering his obscure birth and his duty towards himself, had vowed never to descend to talking of love unless Vanina remained a week without seeing him. The young princess's pride disputed every foot of the way.

"Well," she said to herself at last, "if I see him, it is on my own account, it is for my amusement, and I will never avow the interest with which he inspires me."

She paid long visits to Missirilli, who talked with her as he might have done if twenty people had been present. One night, after having spent the whole day in detesting him and promising herself to be even colder and severer than usual to him, she told him that she loved him. Soon she had nothing left to refuse him.

Though her folly was great, it must be owned that Vanina was perfectly happy. Missirilli had no more thought of what he considered due to his dignity as a man; he loved as they love for the first time at nineteen and in Italy. He had all the scruples of passionate love, even to the extent of acknowledging to the proud young princess the policy which he had employed to make her fall in love with him. He was astonished at the excess of his happiness. Four months passed only too quickly. One day the surgeon gave the invalid his liberty. "But what am I to do?" thought Missirilli. "Am I to remain in hiding under the roof of one of the handsomest women in Rome? And the vile tyrants who kept me thirteen months in prison without letting me see the light of day will think they have broken my spirit! Italy, thou art unfortunate indeed, if thy children abandon thee for so little!"

Vanina never doubted that Pietro's greatest happiness would be to remain attached to her for ever; he seemed only too happy; but a saying of General Bonaparte rankled in the young man's soul and influenced all his conduct towards women. In 1796, when General Bonaparte was leaving Brescia, the magistrates, who accompanied him to the gate of the town, said to him that the Bresciana loved liberty more than all other Italians.

"Yes," he answered, "they love to talk about it to their mistresses."

Missirilli said to Vanina with some constraint:

"As soon as it is night, I must go out."

"Take good care to be in the palace again before daybreak; I'll wait for you."

"At daybreak I'll be several miles from Rome."

"Indeed," said Vanina coldly, "and where are you going to?"

"To Romagna, to take my revenge."

"Seeing that I am rich," Vanina said

with the calmest air imaginable, " I hope that you will accept some arms and some money from me."

Missirilli looked at her for a moment without moving a muscle; then, throwing himself into her arms:

" Soul of my soul, you make me forget everything else, even my duty. But, the nobler your heart is, the better you should understand me."

Vanina wept copiously, and it was settled that he should not leave Rome for another two days yet.

" Pietro," she said to him next day, " you have often told me that a well-known man, a Roman prince for example, who had command of plenty of money, could render great service to the cause of liberty, if ever Austria should be involved in any great war at a distance from us."

" Undoubtedly," said Pietro in astonishment.

" Well then, you have courage; all you lack is position: I am going to offer you my hand and two-hundred-thousand livres a year. I undertake to get my father's consent."

Pietro threw himself at her feet; Vanina was radiant with joy.

" I love you passionately," he said; " but I am a poor servant of my country; and, the unhappier Italy is, the more faithful I must be to her. To obtain Don Asdrubale's consent, I should have to play a sorry part for many years. Vanina, I refuse you."

Missirilli was in a hurry to commit himself by this speech. His courage threatened to fail him.

" My misfortune," he exclaimed, " is that I love you more than life, that to leave Rome is the worst of tortures for me. Ah! why is Italy not delivered from the barbarians? With what pleasure I should embark along with you to go and live in America!"

Vanina remained as if frozen. This refusal of her hand had astonished her pride; but soon she cast herself into Missirilli's arms.

" You never seemed so dear to me as now," she exclaimed; " yes, my little country surgeon, I am yours for ever. You are a great man, like our ancient Romans."

All ideas of the future, all the gloomy suggestions of good sense disappeared; there was a moment of perfect love. When they were able to talk sensibly, Vanina said:

" I shall be in Romagna almost as soon as you. I'll get sent to the baths at Poretta. I will stop at our castle at San Nicolo, near Forli——"

" There I'll spend my life with you!" exclaimed Missirilli.

" My part in future is to dare everything," Vanina resumed with a sigh. " I shall ruin myself for you, but what matter—— Could you love a woman who has lost her honour?"

" Are you not my wife?" said Missirilli, " and a wife always adored? I shall know how to love you and protect you."

Vanina had to go and pay visits. Scarcely had she left Missirilli when he began to think his conduct barbarous.

" What is our *country*, after all?" he said to himself. " It is not a being to whom we owe any gratitude for any benefit, and who might be unhappy and curse us if we failed to be grateful. *Country* and *liberty* are like my cloak, a thing that is useful to me, that I must buy, no doubt, if I have not inherited it from my father; but after all I love country and liberty because these two things are useful to me. If I can do nothing with them, if they are no more use to me than a cloak in August, what is the good of buying them, at an enormous price too? Vanina is so beautiful! She has such a remarkable mind! People will seek to please her; she will forget me. What woman ever had only one lover? Those Roman princes, whom I despise as citizens, have such an advantage over me! They must be very lovable! Ah, if I go away, she will forget me, and I shall lose her for ever!"

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IN the middle of the night Vanina came to see him; he told her of the indecision in which he had been plunged, and the examination to which, because he loved her, he had subjected the great word *country*. Vanina was very happy.

" If he had to choose definitely between his country and me," she said to herself, " the choice would fall on me."

The clock of the neighbouring church struck three; the moment of their last farewells arrived. Pietro tore himself from the arms of his beloved. He was already descending the little stair, when Vanina, restraining her tears, said to him with a smile:

" If you had been tended by some poor countrywoman, would you not do something

out of gratitude? Would you not try to repay her? The future is uncertain; you are going to travel amidst enemies; give me three days out of gratitude, as if I were a poor woman, and in repayment of my trouble."

Missirilli remained. At last he quitted Rome. Thanks to a passport bought from a foreign embassy he reached his home. There was great rejoicing; they had given him up for dead. His friends wished to celebrate his safe return by killing one or two carabineers, as the police in the Papal states are called.

"Do not let us kill an Italian that knows the use of arms, unless we are forced to," said Missirilli; "our country is not an island, like happy England: we need soldiers to resist the intervention of the kings of Europe."

Shortly afterwards, Missirilli, hard pressed by the carabineers, killed two of them with the pistols that Vanina had given him. A price was set on his head.

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VANINA did not make her appearance in Romagna: Missirilli thought he was forgotten. His vanity was hurt; he began to dwell on the difference of rank which separated him from his mistress. In a moment of softening and regret for his past happiness, he took the notion of returning to Rome to see what Vanina was doing. This mad thought was on the point of prevailing over what he believed to be his duty, when one evening the bell of a mountain-church sounded the angelus in a strange fashion, as if the ringer were preoccupied. It was the signal for the meeting of the lodge of carbonari to which Missirilli had been affiliated on his arrival in Romagna. That same night, they all met in a certain hermitage in the woods. The two hermits, stupefied with opium, had no suspicion of the use that was being made of their little dwelling. Missirilli, who arrived very downcast, learned that the head of the lodge had been arrested, and that he, a young man of barely twenty, was to be elected head of a lodge which included men over fifty, who had been engaged in the conspiracies since Murat's expedition of 1815. Pietro felt his heart beat at receiving this unexpected honour. As soon as he was alone, he resolved to think no more of the young Roman lady who had forgotten him, and to consecrate all his thoughts to *delivering Italy from the barbarians.**

Two days later, Missirilli saw in the list of arrivals and departures sent to him as head of the lodge that the Princess Vanina had just arrived at her castle of San Nicolo. To read this name caused more trouble than pleasure to his soul. In vain he thought to make sure of his fidelity to his country by restraining himself from hastening that very night to the castle of San Nicolo; the thought of Vanina whom he was neglecting prevented his fulfilling his duties in a reasonable fashion. He saw her the next day; she loved him as she had done at Rome. Her father, who wished to marry her, had hindered her departure. She brought two-thousand sequins with her. This unexpected assistance helped wonderfully to establish Missirilli in his new dignity. Thanks to them they got daggers made in Corfu, they gained over the confidential secretary of the legate charged with pursuing the carbonari, and also obtained the list of parish priests who served as spies to the government.

It was at this period that one, not the most unreasonable, of the conspiracies that have been attempted in unhappy Italy was finally organised. I shall not enter into details that would be out of place here. I shall content myself with saying that, if the enterprise had been crowned with success Missirilli would have been able to claim a great share of the glory. According to it several thousand insurgents would have risen at a given signal, and awaited under arms the arrival of their superior heads. The decisive moment was at hand, when, as always happens, the conspiracy was paralysed by the arrests of the leaders.

Vanina had not long arrived in Romagna when she fancied she could see that love of country would make her lover forget all other love. The young Roman's pride was chafed. She tried in vain to reason with herself; black disappointment took possession of her; she found herself cursing liberty. One day when she had come to Forli to see Missirilli, she was no longer mistress of her grief, which, so far, her pride had always been able to master.

"Really," she said to him, "you love me like a husband; that's not what I want."

Her tears soon began to flow; but they were tears of shame at having descended

* "*Libra l'Italia de'barbari*," a saying of Petrarch's in 1350, afterwards repeated by Julius II., by Machiavelli, and by Count Alfieri.

to reproaches. Missirilli responded to her tears like one preoccupied. All at once it occurred to Vanina to leave him and return to Rome. She found a cruel joy in punishing herself for the weakness which had just made her speak. After some moments' silence, her mind was made up; she decided that she was unworthy of Missirilli if she did not leave him. She rejoiced in the prospect of his sad surprise when he sought for her at his side, and did not find her. Soon the thought that she had been unable to win the love of the man for whose sake she had committed so many follies revived all her tenderness. She thereupon broke the silence, and did everything in the world to elicit a word of love from him. He said many very tender things to her, with an air of abstraction; but it was with quite a much profounder accent that, talking of his political enterprises, he exclaimed mournfully:

"Ah, if this affair does not succeed, if the government discovers it this time, I'll give it up!"

Vanina remained motionless. For an hour and more she had had the feeling that she was seeing her lover for the last time. His words flashed a fatal ray into her mind. She said to herself:

"The carbonari have already got several thousand sequins from me. There can be no doubt about my devotion to the conspiracy."

Vanina at last roused herself from her reverie, to say to Pietro:

"Will you come and spend twenty-four hours with me at the castle of San Nicolo? Your gathering this evening does not require your presence. To-morrow morning, at San Nicolo, we can walk about; that will calm your agitation and give you all the coolness that you need at such an important juncture."

Pietro consented.

Vanina left him to make preparations for the journey, locking, as usual, the little room in which she hid him.

She hastened to a former waiting-woman of hers, who had left her to get married and set up a small business at Forli. On arriving at this woman's, she hurriedly wrote on the margin of a book of hours, which she found in her room, an exact indication of the place where the lodge of carbonari was to meet that same night. She concluded her denunciation with these words: "This lodge consists of nineteen members; here are their names and addresses." After writing this list, very exact, except that Missirilli's name was omitted, she said to the woman, whom she could depend on:

"Take this book to the Cardinal Legate; let him read what is written and give you back the book. Here are ten sequins; if ever the legate pronounces your name, your death is assured; but you will save my life if you get the legate to read the page I have just written."

Everything succeeded perfectly. The legate's fears prevented him from behaving like a great lord. He let the woman of the people who asked to speak with him appear in his presence masked, but on condition that she had her hands tied. In this state the shopwoman was brought into the presence of the great person, whom she found entrenched behind an immense table covered with a green cloth.

The legate read the page of the book of hours, holding it well away from him, for fear of some subtle poison. He gave it back to the shopwoman, and did not have her followed. In less than forty minutes after leaving her lover, Vanina, who had seen her former waiting-woman's return, appeared once more to Missirilli, convinced that thenceforth he was entirely hers. She told him that there was an extraordinary commotion in the town; patrols of carabineers were to be seen in streets where they never used to go.

"If you'll take my advice," she added, "we'll start for San Nicolo at once."

Missirilli consented to do so. They walked to the young princess's carriage, which, with her companion, a discreet and well-paid confidante, was waiting for her half a league outside the town.

On arriving at the castle of San Nicolo, Vanina, who was uneasy about the strange step that she had taken, redoubled her tenderness to her lover. But it seemed to her that in talking love to him she was acting a part. The night before, when she played the traitor, she had forgotten about remorse. As she clasped her lover in her arms, she said to herself:

"There is a word that might be uttered in his hearing, and, once it was pronounced, he would have a horror of me at once and for ever."

In the middle of the night, one of Vanina's servants came abruptly into her room. This man was a carbonaro, though she did not suspect it. So, then, Missirilli had

secrets from her, even about details like that. She shuddered. The man had come to warn Missirilli that during the night the houses of nineteen carbonari at Forli had been searched, and they themselves arrested the moment they returned from the lodge. Although taken by surprise, nine had escaped. The carabineers had been able to take ten of them to prison in the citadel. On entering it, one of them had thrown himself down the well, which is very deep, and had killed himself.

Vanina was covered with confusion; fortunately Pietro did not observe it: he could have read her crime in her eyes . . . " At this very moment," the servant added, " the garrison of Forli is forming a cordon in all the streets. Each soldier is within speaking distance of his neighbour. The inhabitants cannot cross from one side of the street to the other except where an officer is stationed."

After the man had gone, Pietro was pensive, but only for an instant.

" There is nothing that can be done for the moment," he said at last.

Vanina was like to die; she trembled beneath her lover's glance.

" Whatever is wrong with you ? " he said at last.

Then he began to think about something else, and ceased to look at her. About the middle of the day, she ventured to say to him:

" That's another lodge discovered; I should think you'll keep quiet for some time now."

" Very quiet," Missirilli answered, with a smile that made her shudder.

She went to make a necessary visit to the village priest of San Nicolo, perhaps a spy of the Jesuits. On returning for dinner at seven o'clock, she found the little room where her lover was hidden deserted. Beside herself, she ran all through the house seeking for him; he was not there. In despair she returned to the little room; only then did she catch sight of a note; she read:

*I am going to surrender myself to the legate; I despair of our cause; Heaven is against us. Who has betrayed us? Apparently the wretch who threw himself into the well. Since my life is useless to poor Italy, I do not wish that my comrades, seeing that I alone have not been arrested, should imagine that I have sold them. Adieu; if you love me, think on how to avenge me. Ruin, annihilate, the infamous wretch that has betrayed us, even though he be my father.*

Vanina fell into a chair, half-fainting and plunged in the most cruel unhappiness. She was unable to utter a word; her eyes were dry and burning.

At last she flung herself on her knees.

" Great God! accept my vow," she exclaimed; " yes, I will punish the infamous wretch who has been a traitor; but Pietro must first be restored to liberty."

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AN hour later she was on her way to Rome. Her father had long been urging her to return. During her absence, he had arranged her marriage with Prince Livio Savelli. Vanina had scarcely arrived when he mentioned it to her, trembling. To his great astonishment, she consented at the first word. That same evening, at Countess Vitteleschi's house, her father presented Don Livio almost officially to her; she talked a great deal with him. He was a most elegant young man, and kept the finest possible horses; but, though he was admitted to be clever, his character was supposed to be so light that he was not an object of suspicion to the government. Vanina thought that by first turning his head she would make a convenient agent of him. Since he was nephew to Monsignore Savelli-Catanzara, governor of Rome and minister of police, she supposed that the spies would not presume to follow him.

After having treated the amiable Don Livio exceedingly well for some days, Vanina announced to him that he would never be her husband; he was, according to her, empty-headed.

" If you were not a child," she told him, " your uncle's clerks would have no secrets from you. For example, what has been decided about the carbonari who were discovered recently at Forli ? "

Two days later Don Livio came to tell her that all the carbonari taken at Forli had made their escape. She fastened her great black eyes upon him with the bitter smile of most profound contempt, and did not deign to speak to him all that evening. The next day but one Don Livio came to acknowledge to her with a blush that he had been deceived the first time.

" But," he said, " I have got the key to my uncle's study; I have seen from the papers that I found there that a

congregation (or commission) composed of some of the leading cardinals and prelates is meeting in the strictest secrecy and discussing whether these carbonari should be tried at Ravenna or at Rome. The nine carbonari taken at Forli and their head, one Missirilli, who has been foolish enough to surrender himself, are at the present moment confined in the castle of San Leo.

At the word " foolish," Vanina pinched the prince with all her might.

" I want," she said, " to see the official papers myself, and go into your uncle's study with you ; you have most likely read them wrong."

At these words Don Livio shuddered ; Vanina was demanding a thing almost impossible ; but the young woman's strange genius redoubled his love. A day or two later Vanina, disguised as a man and wearing a pretty little coat of the Savelli livery, was able to spend half-an-hour amidst the police minister's most secret papers. She felt a thrill of the keenest delight when she discovered the daily report on " Pietro Missirilli, prisoner awaiting trial." Her hands trembled as she held the paper. As she read that name she was on the point of being overcome. When they went out from the governor of Rome's palace Vanina permitted Don Livio to embrace her.

" You are coming well out of the tests to which I am submitting you," she said.

After a speech like that the young prince would have set fire to the Vatican to please Vanina. That evening there was a ball at the French ambassador's ; she danced a great deal, and almost always with Don Livio. He was intoxicated with happiness ; she must not allow him to reflect.

" My father is sometimes strange," Vanina said to him one day. " This morning he dismissed two of his servants, who came to tell me their sorrows. One of them has asked a place with your uncle the governor of Rome ; the other, who has been an artilleryman with the French, would like to be employed in the castle of Sant' Angelo."

" I'll take them both into my service," said the young prince briskly.

" Is that what I asked you ? " Vanina replied proudly. " I repeated those poor fellows' petitions word for word ; they ought to get what they asked, and not something else."

There was nothing more difficult. Monsignore Catanzara was anything but an imprudent man, and only admitted servants into his house who were well known to him. In the midst of a life apparently full of all manner of pleasures, Vanina, tormented by remorse, was very unhappy. The slowness of events was killing her. Her father's man of business had procured money for her. Ought she to flee from her father's house and go to Romagna, and attempt to get her lover out of prison ? Senseless as this notion was she was on the point of carrying it into execution when chance took pity on her.

Don Livio said to her :

" The ten carbonari of Missirilli's lodge are going to be transferred to Rome on the understanding that they are to be executed in Romagna after they have been condemned. That is what my uncle has got the Pope to sanction this evening. You and I are the only persons in Rome who know this secret. Are you satisfied ! "

" You are becoming a man," Vanina replied ; " make me a present of your portrait."

The day before Missirilli was due to arrive at Rome Vanina found a pretext for going to Città-Castellana. The prison of that town is where the carbonari spend the night when they are transferred from Romagna to Rome. She saw Missirilli in the morning as he came out of prison. He was chained by himself to a cart ; he seemed to her to be pale, but by no means downhearted. An old woman threw a bunch of violets to him ; Missirilli smiled her his thanks.

Vanina had seen her lover ; all her thoughts seemed renewed ; she had fresh courage. A long time ago she had procured a good preferment to the Abbate Cari, the chaplain of the castle of Sant' Angelo, in which her lover was to be confined ; she had made this good priest her confessor. At Rome it is no small thing to be confessor of a princess who is niece to the governor.

The trial of the Forli carbonari did not last long. In revenge for their arrival in Rome, which it had been unable to prevent, the extreme party so contrived that the commission which was to try them was composed of the most ambitious prelates. This commission was presided over by the minister of police.

The law against carbonari is clear ; those from Forli could cherish no hope ; none the less they defended their lives by every possible subterfuge. Not only did their

judges condemn them to death, but several declared for atrocious tortures, that their hands should be cut off, and such like. The minister of police, whose fortune was made (for no one leaves that position except to take a red hat), had no use for cut-off hands: when he referred the sentence to the Pope he had the punishment of all the condemned men commuted to several years' imprisonment. Pietro Missirilli alone was excepted. The minister regarded that young man as a dangerous fanatic, and besides he had already been condemned to death as guilty of the murder of the two carabineers already mentioned. Vanina knew about the sentence and its commutation a few minutes after the minister had returned from his audience of the Pope.

Next day Monsignore Catanzara returned to his palace about midnight and found no sign of his valet in his room; the minister, astonished, rang several times; at last an old, imbecile servant appeared: the minister, out of all patience, decided to undress unaided. He locked his door; it was very warm; he took his gown and threw it in a heap on a chair. The gown, thrown too hard, went over the chair and struck the muslin curtain at the window, and showed the form of a man. The minister quickly rushed to his bed and seized a pistol. As he was returning to the window a very young man, in his livery, came towards him pistol in hand. At this sight the minister raised his pistol and took aim; he was about to fire; the young man said to him, laughing:

"What, Monsignore, do you not recognise Vanina Vanini?"

"What is the meaning of this unseemly pleasantry?" the Minister retorted angrily.

"Let us discuss things coolly," said the young woman. "To begin with, your pistol is not loaded."

The Minister, astonished, satisfied himself that such was the case; after which he drew a dagger from his vest-pocket.

Vanina said to him, with a charming little air of authority:

"Let us be seated, Monsignore."

And she calmly took her place on a sofa.

"Are you alone, though?" the Minister said.

"Absolutely alone, I swear!" exclaimed Vanina.

The Minister was careful to verify this: he went round the room and looked everywhere; after which he sat down on a chair three paces from Vanina.

"What interest should I have," said Vanina in a gentle and reasonable tone, "in attempting the life of a moderate man, who would probably be succeeded by some weak, hot-headed person that would be capable of undoing himself and others besides."

"What do you want, pray, madam?" the minister said somewhat testily. "This scene is not to my taste, and must cease."

"What I am about to add," Vanina replied haughtily, suddenly forgetting her gracious air, "concerns you more than me. There is a desire that the life of the carbonaro Missirilli should be spared: if he is executed, you will not survive him a week. I have no interest in all this; the folly which you deplore I did to amuse myself in the first place, and next, to oblige a lady who is one of my friends. I wished," Vanina continued, resuming her affability, "I wished to render a service to an accomplished man, who soon will be my uncle, and, from all appearance, should carry the fortunes of his house to a great pitch."

The minister cast aside his vexed air: Vanina's beauty no doubt contributed to this rapid change. Monsignore Catanzara's taste for pretty women was well known in Rome, and in her disguise of a footman of the house of Savelli, with well-fitting silk stockings, a red vest, her little sky-blue coat laced with silver, and the pistol in her hand, Vanina was ravishing.

"My future niece," said the minister, almost laughing, "you are committing a great folly, and it will not be your last."

"I hope that so discreet a person as you will keep my secret, especially from Don Livio; and, to make sure of your promise, my dear uncle, if you grant me the life of my friend's protégé, I'll give you a kiss."

Thus continuing the conversation in that half-jocular tone in which Roman ladies know how to discuss the most important affairs, Vanina contrived to give this interview, which she had begun pistol in hand, the air of a visit paid by the young princess Savelli to her uncle the governor of Rome.

Soon Monsignore Catanzara, although rejecting with scorn the notion of being influenced by fear, went so far as to explain to his niece all the difficulties that he would encounter in saving Missirilli's life. As he discussed them, the minister walked up and down the room with Vanina; he took up

a carafe of lemonade that was on the chimney-piece, and poured some into a crystal glass. When he was on the point of putting it to his lips, Vanina secured it, and, after holding it some time, let it fall into the garden, as if by carelessness. A moment later, the minister took a chocolate pastille out of a sweetmeat-box. Vanina snatched it from him, and said, laughing as she did so :

" Do take care ; everything in the house is poisoned, for they intended your death. It is I who have obtained the respite of my future uncle, so as not to enter the family of Savelli absolutely empty-handed."

Monsignore Catanzara, greatly astonished, thanked his niece, and gave her great hopes of Missirilli's life.

" Our bargain is settled," exclaimed Vanina, " and in proof of it, here is your reward," she said, embracing him.

The minister took his reward.

" I must own, my dear Vanina," he added, " that I am not fond of blood. Besides, I am still young, though I perhaps look very old to you ; and I may live to see the day when blood shed now will leave a stain."

Two o'clock was striking when Monsignore Catanzara escorted Vanina to the private gate of his garden.

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THE day after next, when the minister appeared before the Pope, not a little anxious about the course that he had to pursue, His Holiness said to him :

" Before we go any further, I have a favour to ask you. There is one of those carbonari from Forli, who is still under sentence of death ; the thought keeps me from sleeping : the man must be saved."

The minister, seeing that the Pope had made up his mind, made many objections, and ended by writing a decree, or *motu proprio*, which the Pope signed, contrary to custom.

It had occurred to Vanina that she might perhaps obtain her lover's pardon, but that they would try to poison him. The previous evening, Missirilli had received some small parcels of ship-biscuit from Abbate Cari, her confessor, with a warning not to touch the food provided by the State.

Vanina, having afterwards learned that the Forli carbonari were to be transferred to the castle of San Leo, wished to try to see Missirilli at Città-Castellana on his way ; she arrived in that town twenty-four hours in advance of the prisoners ; there she found Abbate Cari, who had preceded her by some days. He had got the jailor's leave for Missirilli to hear Mass at midnight in the prison chapel. He had obtained even more : if Missirilli would allow his arms and legs to be fastened with a chain, the jailor would withdraw to the door of the chapel, so that he could always see the prisoner, for whom he was responsible, but could not hear what he said.

The day which was to decide Vanina's destiny dawned at last. Early in the morning she shut herself up in the prison chapel. Who could tell the thoughts which agitated her during that long day ? Did Missirilli love her sufficiently to pardon her ? She had denounced his lodge, but she had saved his life. When reason regained command of that tortured soul, Vanina hoped that he would consent to leave Italy in her company; if she had sinned, it was through excess of love. As four o'clock struck, she heard the tread of the carabineers' horses on the pavement in the distance. Each tread seemed to ring in her heart. Soon she made out the rumbling of the carts which conveyed the prisoners. They halted in the little square in front of the prison ; she saw two carabineers lift out Missirilli, who was alone on a cart and so heavily loaded with irons that he could not move. " At least he is alive," she said to herself with tears in her eyes ; " they have not poisoned him." The evening was cruel ; the altar-lamp, which was hung high up, and which the jailor stinted of oil, was the only light in the gloomy chapel. Vanina's eyes wandered over the tombs of some great lords of the Middle Ages who had died in the neighbouring prison. Their statues looked ferocious.

All sounds had long ago ceased ; Vanina was absorbed in her black thoughts. Shortly after midnight struck, she thought she heard a slight noise like the flutter of a bat. She tried to walk, and fell half-fainting on the altar-rail. At the same instant, two phantoms stood beside her, without her having heard them come. They were the jailor and Missirilli, so loaded with chains that he was almost swathed in them. The jailor opened a lantern, which he placed on the altar-rail, beside Vanina, in such a position that he could see his prisoner clearly. Then he withdrew into the background, near the door. Scarcely had the jailor removed, when Vanina flung herself on Missirilli's neck. As she clasped

him in her arms, she felt nothing but his cold, sharp chains. " Who put these chains on him ? " she thought. She felt no pleasure in embracing her lover. To this pain succeeded another more piercing : she believed, for a moment, that Missirilli knew of her crime, his reception of her was so chilly.

" Dear friend," he said to her at last, " I regret the love which you have conceived for me ; though I search, I cannot discover the merit that might have inspired it. Let us return, I entreat you, to more Christian feelings, let us forget the illusions which once led us astray ; I cannot be yours. The continual misfortune that has dogged my enterprises proceeds, perhaps, from the state of mortal sin in which I have always lived. Even listening to the counsels of human prudence, why was I not arrested with my friends on that fatal night at Forli ? Why was I not found at my post at the moment of danger ? Why was it that my absence could authorise the most cruel suspicions ? Because I had another passion than the liberation of Italy."

Vanina could not recover from the surprise that she felt at the change in Missirilli. Though he did not appear to have grown thinner, he looked like thirty. Vanina attributed this change to the bad treatment that he had suffered in prison ; she burst into tears.

" Ah," she said to him, " the jailors promised so faithfully that they would treat you kindly ! "

The fact was that, at the approach of death, all the religious principles that were consistent with his passion for the liberation of Italy had revived in the young carbonaro's heart. Little by little Vanina perceived that the astonishing change which she noticed in her lover was entirely moral, and in no wise the result of physical ill-treatment. Her grief, which she had thought at its height, was augmented by this discovery.

Missirilli ceased speaking ; Vanina seemed on the point of being suffocated by her sobs. He added, with some emotion :

" If I loved anything on earth, it would be you, Vanina ; but thanks to God I have only one object left me in life ; I will die in prison, or in the endeavour to restore liberty to Italy."

There was another silence ; evidently Vanina was unable to speak : she tried to do so, in vain. Missirilli added :

" Duty is cruel, my friend ; but, if there were no pain in accomplishing it, where would heroism be ? Give me your word that you will not try to see me again."

As well as his close-bound chain allowed him, he made a little motion with his wrist and stretched out his fingers to Vanina.

" If you will let a man who was dear to you advise you, be sensible and marry the deserving man whom your father intends for you. Do not make any awkward confidence to him ; but on the other hand do not ever try to see me again ; let us be strangers to each other in future. You have advanced a considerable sum for the service of your country ; if ever it is delivered from its tyrants, that sum will be repaid to you in national funds."

Vanina was overwhelmed. While he spoke to her, Pietro's eye had never once flashed, except when he uttered the word " country."

At last pride came to the rescue of the young princess ; she had provided herself with diamonds and small files. Without a word of reply, she offered them to Missirilli. " I accept them out of duty," he said, " for I must try to escape ; but I will never see you again ; I swear it in presence of your new benefits. Adieu, Vanina ; promise me that you will never write to me, never try to see me ; leave all of me to my country, I am dead to you : farewell."

" No ! " Vanina replied furiously, " I wish you to know what I have done, led by the love I had for you."

With that she told him all her proceedings from the moment that Missirilli quitted the castle of San Nicolo to surrender himself to the legate. When the recital was ended, Vanina said :

" All that is nothing ; I did more for love of you."

And she told him of her treason.

" Ah, monster ! " exclaimed Pietro in a rage, hurling himself upon her, and he tried to fell her with his chains.

He would have succeeded in doing so, but for the jailor, who ran forward at his first cries. He seized Missirilli.

" Here, monster ! I won't be indebted to you for anything," said Missirilli to Vanina, flinging the files and diamonds at her as well as his chains permitted; and he hastened away.

Vanina remained utterly crushed. She returned to Rome, and the newspapers announced that she had soon married Prince Don Livio Savelli.

# Comfort

*"Even to be happy is a dangerous thing"*

## Mrs. HENRY DUDENEY

THAT October night there was such a glorious, moon-flooded sky that groups of people stood looking up at it, in awed, yet half-jocular way, the way of the Londoner who regards Nature as an old fool and a good joke; a sort of grandfather that you are very glad to visit in July and August.

William Amoore, regarding the moon, felt strange stirrings of the heart. It was a sharp pain, yet he applauded it, for he had come to that age when you welcome emotion as at least a healthy survival. He compared his feelings to wearing tight shoes: he had a grotesque trick of comparison; they pinched your corns if you had any, but their superb effect upon the world was gratifying. He had small feet, and was proud of them, yet they gave him an air of mincing when he walked; for he was a big man, and scoffers, marking him, might have said "dancing master."

He walked swiftly up Southampton Row, unlike those fools who would stand still and stare. He considered, marking yearningly the silver-flooded sky, that in country places lonely houses would throw gaunt shadows. Yet the shadows of hills would be more gaunt. And how about the great tossings of bare branches? He turned to the study of several senseless tabs (mistaken battlements!) upon the jacket of a young person who walked blissfully with her young man. Amoore, his small feet suddenly stealthy, stalked close behind the two, watching these little lovers—such a dingy, petty pair, and unconsciously pathetic, the boy with his pallid face, the girl with her riotous, rankly cheap garments! She wore spectacles, and blinked at each gas-lamp. There were weak, tangled strings of velvet, tying nothing, on her hat. She looked the draggled owl. Her hands were bare, and Amoore could have wept at the sight of that tawdry ring upon the roughened finger. The boy was frankly fondling that hand. Amoore supposed, that these two, comic yet noble, expressed in their moon-mad to-night the romance of the whole world.

He was fully old enough to be the father of such a pair. If he and Comfort had married——

He dropped violently back, and, cursing the marvellous sky for the memories of bartered things that it evoked, he cut up a side street. He decided to get under a roof without delay. He would go and see Snelling. Now Snelling had rooms in Great Ormond Street, and he was a man of Amoore's own state—that is, a bachelor of forty-five, more or less, and possessed of moderate means, upon which he idly existed.

Amoore, moving slowly, felt the strange peace of those tall, old houses, with the long windows and heavily hooded doors, sink into his soul. The narrow strip of sky, all rippled and so like a sea, he no longer resented. Comfort had lived by the sea, and, so far as he knew, she was living by it still. Well, then! Let her—and what was that to him?

Snelling was sitting in a room with a little fire, but with the windows wide open and the blinds drawn up.

"You also are looking at the moon," Amoore said when their curt greetings were over. "I came in here to get away from her. The streets are full of lovers, and of people no longer lovers, yet wishing that they were."

"My dear fellow"—Snelling sounded a neat laugh—"the windows are open because the fire made the room too warm. Why do you hate the moon and poor, dear lovers?"

As he asked this he seemed to simper, for his rosy, small face was well suited to feminine expression. There was disparity between these two men. Snelling was fresh-coloured and precise; Amoore had a long discontented face, harsh and yellow; yet he was handsome in a way; his figure was broad and his head massively set.

There was a manner of sea, hills and wind to Amoore. Yet he had diverted all this by the life he had led, and so in ways he became like Snelling. They both carried an air of self-indulgence and non-achievement.

"I hate her because I am sick of the moon-mood," said Amoore, sitting down by the fire. "And yet I wish that I wasn't sick. You and I are getting old, getting bored, and yet are holding on with all our teeth"—he laughed and looked at Snelling's faultless little mouth—"our own teeth, as yet, to bodily joys. It is a suicidal reflection," rambled Amoore. "I mean the feeling that your joy in all the joys—those that you have learned—is becoming daily less. They slip away, they evade you, and there are no new ones to take their place. The imagination remains fresh, but the body is jaded. You whip it up, but where's the good?"

"You are very cheerful company to-night, upon my word!" Snelling, speaking, fretfully got up and shut the windows and drew down the blinds.

"Thank you, but blame the moon." Amoore himself stood up and then sat down again. "The changes in London are enough to depress men of our age and habits, Snelling. Houses are down, streets are swept away. That jolly disreputable tangle of courts and alleys that doubled and twisted between here and Piccadilly Circus when we were young! Do you remember? We've lost everything. The taste is out of all the dishes. Take the dirty things away."

Amoore grinned at his friend. "Don't sit so bolt-upright, with an air of being ready to grasp the poker. I am neither drunk nor mad. See how I read your thoughts! And you cannot stop me. Don't attempt it; that's a dear fellow. Let me run right down. That is always best with me."

Snelling leaned back in the chair, resignedly putting the tips of his fingers together, staring at his nice socks. Yet it was clear that he wanted to say something himself, and that it was particular. More than once he had half-opened his mouth.

"Is there anything more melancholy than the company of men younger than yourself?" demanded Amoore. "They ignore you, they snub you, they——"

"They do worse than that; they listen to you respectfully," said Snelling.

"Think what we might have done and what we might have been," Amoore said. "I'm growing to hate the daily paper; that is another joy gone. I see in the papers the names of men born in my own year, or even later, and they have distinguished themselves. What have we done? What can we ever do now?"

"Look here, Amoore; you want a digestive tonic, and you want"—Snelling now actually sniggered—"a wife. The time comes when every man must settle."

In this succinct way he expressed—if commonly—the common need. Amoore felt that.

"You think so?" he said. "A wife! It had not occurred to me."

"A wife!" Snelling nodded wisely. "No young girl, but a woman of ripe years and warm means."

"What a fruity way of putting it! Is a plum going to drop into *your* mouth? Is that what you have been trying to tell me ever since I came in?"

"If you choose to put it in that eccentric way—yes, I am going to get married. The lady in question is of gentle birth; please understand that, my dear Amoore, once and for all." Snelling spoke nervously, yet with the dogged air of the man who insists that if you cannot respect him you shall at least respect his choice. "You will meet her some day, as a matter of course," he added, and looked uneasy.

"Don't suppose I shall. Who is it?"

"She owns the Flautist. You know the house—a most high-class affair, near the British Museum. So many well-born women run a *pension* nowadays, don't they? And it is a paying concern. She is a widow; an unfortunate marriage and a very sad story."

"I congratulate you," returned Amoore. He sounded vague, and he stood sharply up, looking to the door. He appeared to have begotten some new thought. "Where will you go for your honeymoon? Don't let it be hills. Grassy heights, in my opinion, are solely for young lovers."

"Our idea was Dieppe, as a matter of fact," Snelling told him.

"Excellent; your ideas always are. Her ideas, I mean. My mistake is to have too much feeling." He was plainly thinking of something else.

"Exactly. Do things; don't dwell on them," advised his friend. "That is my advice to you. Do things; don't dwell on

them," he repeated, cheapening his brilliance by a second burnish.

"Do things. Yes, I will," promised Amoore. He nodded solemnly and jerked out his right hand. Snelling shook it. Each showed relief at parting.

When he was alone in the stately, dim street, Amoore walked fast. His face was puckered; he looked old, yet eager. He presently crossed Lamb's Conduit Street, standing suddenly in a flare of lights and traffic. It seemed to scare him. He traversed other streets, all of them dingy and quiet and very haughty.

"Suppose," he said, more than once, and with defiant starings at the superb sky, "that I went into Sussex and looked up Comfort!"

He had meant to take an early train next day, but he could not get away from the force of habit; a deadness of action, to say nothing of desire was creeping over him in all ways. It was his habit each day after breakfast to walk from his rooms in King Street to his club in St. James's Square. He did this, feeling that he certainly must run through the newspapers before he travelled down to Comfort and asked her, point blank, if she would marry him. Naturally Comfort would; he never doubted it. And no one else had ever asked her; of this he already felt sure.

As he went through his club Amoore wondered if this would be his very last visit to the place. He reflected upon the possibility, feeling jubilant, regretful, very youthful, altogether queer.

He had quite forgotten that on the way to Comfort, in her corner of Sussex, you had to change at a lonely junction, and that the trains never fitted. He waited nearly an hour there, and although he never fussed over his health, as that silly fellow Snelling did, yet he irritably wondered if he would get a chill. Take it altogether, your body was a nuisance! Yet you had not found your soul, and you were not even sure that you had one.

He had wished to reach Comfort quickly, intangibly. Say that they could have found themselves in each other's arms again upon some dimpled hill! As it was, here was he, a middle-aged and chilly gentleman, fuming at a junction! There was a comic side even to romance, and you could not evade it.

At last, however, he was walking briskly across the hills, from the drowsy village to the rambling farmhouse where Love dwelt. It never crossed his mind that Comfort had changed, departed, got married, or just died. His step was jaunty; how could you step other than gaily upon this springy, sweet turf of the south downs! It was good to see them again, the darlings. As he trod the broad path that girdled the last hill, he was humming; and it was an old air. The bag that he carried became nothing but a featherweight, just a fluff of goose-down! Comfort, in the past, had made cushions of goose-down. Worshipfully he once had watched her stripping the quills.

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IT must have been just about here where first (and last, for that matter!) he had kissed her. Smiling, he stood still, looking down at the ground, looking round at all the gentle undulations of successive hills. Yes, it was here, close to the disused, overgrown quarry. That had been a summer night, and in the great cup of the quarry clumps of golden, lamp-like little flowers had gleamed. Looking close now, his heart hurting him, he saw the seeded skeletons of flowers—descendants of those that he had known. Comfort and he had picked a bunch each that night. This was the place. He nearly stooped to kiss the sacred, sheep-trimmed down; yet he only—nearly! He was forty-five—more—and he had developed weariness, with some humour.

He went quickly on. Just below were the iron gates that shut Comfort away in her substantial stone farmhouse. He could see the elms—large, noble trees—that were grouped about the place, and as he went up the drive, dogs barked. He wondered painfully just how and where he would find Comfort, and what dress she would have on. Did she do her fair hair in the same sleek way? It had wound about her head, looking like a wreath of ripe corn.

On the step he stood still, letting the black wind blow upon him; watching the moon, which seemed to skulk treacherously behind a cloud; staring at the door, which was low-hung and heavy; asking himself: "Is this the right door—Romance?" As he pulled the bell and heard its peevish complaining within he said to himself, freakishly: "Shall I make this a runaway ring?" He could have done this safely. He thought, gazing desperately into the

heart of dark bushes growing near, "I could duck down behind those shrubs and no one be the wiser."

When the maid came, he asked for Miss Cobb, and the prosaic sound of Comfort's surname made him feel an old fool. He was dying to run away; but it was now too late to play the mischievous small boy. The maidservant led him through the square, well-lighted hall and opened the drawing-room door. As she did this Amoore felt the double sense of fire and industry. Instantly afterward he realised that the easy, jolly figure over there in the full light from the lamp was Comfort's, and that when he was announced she had been machining.

"Mr. Amoore, miss," said the maid, and shut the door softly as she went away. So these old lovers stood transfixed, in the warm room, and quite alone.

Comfort changed colour; she advanced. There was certainly more of her than in the past. She was softer and broader, and yet in some ways sharper. Amoore, noticing everything, demanding much, was subtly affronted.

The peevish pursing of her mouth perhaps, her accentuated air of peasant! She had always been of the dairy type. Again, he distrusted those fine lines round her eyes. They betokened niggardly activities. His heart dropped.

"Willie!" she gasped, looking at him and then looking back at the machine. He had an uneasy feeling that he had arrived, untimely, in the middle of an important seam.

She put out both hands and smiled at him frankly. Her blue eyes asked him a dozen questions. She had pink hands, and they carried tokens both of the dairy and the oven. Butter-pats and the lady-like elegancies of little cakes! Amoore understood, and he liked it—for those hands of hers renewed his youth. They had not changed at all.

Comfort led, or rather induced, him to the sofa. It was drawn near to the clear fire, and they sank together into square cushions filled with goose-down. They looked dazed.

"This is a surprise, Mr. Amoore," she said, and smiled kindly at him again.

"Why Mr. Amoore? You called me Willie in your first surprise." He was blinking round him at the traditional peace of the place: the hearth where wood burned, pictures on the wall, which he remembered; a polished card-table over there, with drawing-room baubles of the old-fashioned heirloom sort disposed upon it.

"Very well. I will call you Willie," said Comfort. She beamed. There was candid joy all over her wholesome face. A little too unabashed, perhaps? Amoore was most mournfully critical on this, his great night of return.

"You used to call me all sorts of things," he reminded her, so shyly that it seemed as if he, sad and grizzled man, were a maiden and a wooed one.

Comfort laughed. It was a touch too ringing a sound! "I know I did. Willie, Will, Billiam, William, Bill." She finished these names off helplessly, suddenly seeming to flinch and retreat. She dismissed her hearty, open manner—that healthy, too wholesome air which made Amoore feel as if a draught blew through some crack of the door!

"Good heavens, Comfort, my dear!" He caught her housewifely hands in one of his, and he remarked, with gloating, nice little dimples and no rings! "How madly we loved each other—this boy"—he touched his sleeve with his free hand—"that girl! Can't we coax it all back? Let us loose our wits again. Help me, dear."

He sounded so imploring. Comfort, as she would have phrased it, felt put out. An awkward yet youthful air of falter overcame her, and it encouraged Amoore. He forgot that she had grown broad and that he had grown grey.

"What a romance!" he murmured. "You were seventeen; your mother found out and was angry. It was the very finest feeling, that early love of ours, and we only got punished for it, poor little beggars! We were just fairies got astray; and they put us in the parish pound."

He laughed; he studied her downcast face. Her eyelids got pink; yet she showed proper restraint, and no tear fell. He was alarmed, when she at last looked up, by her calm air of affection. Not for affection—diluted fluid—had he come striding across the charming hills to-night beneath the compelling moon.

"I want to laugh and kiss and cry," he confessed, "all in a breath, my love."

Comfort now betrayed an air of restraining him. She was distrustful—as your practical person always is—of pure romance. Amoore thought, as he met her embarrassed glance, that it really might have been Snelling's.

"Why did they not let us get married?" he asked, petulantly. "They were foolish, the four of them. Why was it?"

"Your father did not consider a tenant-farmer's daughter a good enough match," explained Comfort. She sounded simple and spiteful. "And they are all dead," she added, with the proper sigh that was due to her own parents and to his.

"Who manages the farm for you? And are you here alone?" asked Amoore. She had made him, for the moment, practical.

"I am alone. I could not bear to leave the old place. Walter Buckman manages. Do you remember him?"

"Rather! A narrow man, with eyes set high in his face."

"I've never noticed his eyes," returned Comfort, thoughtfully; and she seemed to be conscientiously trying to recall them. "He makes the farm pay; an excellent bailiff." Amoore had a horrid feeling that she would now begin to instruct him upon the state of the markets.

"It all seems so petty—the old people's opposition," he said, hurriedly. "My father had high hopes of me. But I've done nothing, and I am forty-four."

"Forty-six next August, Billiam."

"Is it? Then you——"

"Forty-three," said Comfort, calmly.

¶

AMOORE began to talk to her as he never would have talked to any man. He spoke of his vague ambitions, his sour hopes, and lean regrets; of all the things that he had not done, nor even essayed to do. The sense of self-torture blazed in him, and his arm, which boldly he had put round her, became more rigid and less that of the lover. Yet, disencumbering himself, he knew quite well that limited good women of the Comfort sort did not understand this sort of pain; would not, could not. They listened patiently, and that was something.

"They ought to have shipped me to the Colonies. I wanted to go. A cramped life has been my ruin," he concluded.

Growing more gloomy, he considered his trivial bachelor days. Things that until now had seemed harmless, just occasional turns taking their proper place in the programme, grew in import. They divided him from peace, innocence, and Comfort. They were a gulf. Up till this moment he had been bored. Now he was tortured. Yet he rather welcomed this new feeling of remorse, since at least it was a sharp, live pain. He jumped up.

"Shall we go into the garden? Do! Let us look at the moon. I hated her last night, but to-night I would kiss her—if I could, and if you would promise not to be jealous." He grinned fondly at Comfort, and she certainly blushed.

"You don't think"—she turned the latch of the long window—"that we shall find it too cold out there?"

"Cold! No. Yet the wind, now I think of it, was sharp between my shoulder-blades as I crossed the downs to-night." This was rueful admission for a romanticist. Amoore's face twisted as he talked.

Comfort said, sensibly: "The hills are heavy with dew on these autumn nights. I get a touch of rheumatism in my knee sometimes."

He flung the window wider back and stepped out. "Come along," he cried, masterfully.

Comfort came.

"Do you remember," he asked her, as they moved thoughtfully beneath the thrilling moon, "that your mother used to send you round with charitable messes to sick old women? I would meet you on the way."

She nodded. "At the stile," she said; "and I never pass by without remembering you, Billy."

"As I came across the hills to-night I saw the spectres of those yellow flowers sticking up round the death-white cheeks of the quarry. We picked a bunch each that July night."

Comfort said, sentimentally: "I've kept mine." Her calm blue eyes asked him: "Have you?"

She stooped to a flower-bed and said, in a thoughtful, rather worried way: "I've never seen petunias such a strange colour. The moon changes everything. Did you shut the window, Willie, when we came out?"

He nodded—a gruff enough jerk of the head. He looked at the marvellous petunias. They were purple—their lawful tint—yet they were more warm than any earthly wine.

He had all along known that Comfort would consent, and when they returned to the house, betrothed, he felt convinced that they were going to be marvellously happy. There was some special essence to a late love. And they certainly loved each other:

the test of this was that after many years of silence, they had renewed romantic speech.

In the warm drawing-room, as they stood there again, feeling perhaps sheepish, Comfort's eyes were sparkling. They looked very blue and hard. Amoore with his hateful sense of divination—that critical faculty which destroyed his joys for him—knew that she was filled with a feminine sense of triumph. She would be proud to show him off, to pretend that this was why she had never married anyone else. For she had, of course, reached the stage of being spoken of by her contemporary women as "poor dear Comfort." The younger women would say behind her back: "Poor old Miss Cobb." Amoore knew.

"You must go now," she was saying to him. "They will give you a bed at the Dappled Cow. Mrs. Trip is most reliable. Everything will be aired and ready." She glanced at the clock and added: "It really isn't late. October evenings do draw in."

"Mother Trip! Is she alive still? Nothing changes down here." Amoore looked reflective and dismayed.

"Nothing changes," said Comfort, placidly; "and how surprised she will be to see you!" She giggled.

"I shall be a surprise to the whole neighbourhood and a gratification," returned Amoore, twinkling at his love's triumphant face.

After this night the weather broke up, and everyone rejoiced. It had been a dry summer. The country was parched. Amoore, lying in the guest-room of the Dappled Cow, awoke every morning to the sound of rain. He would lie melancholy and quiet, studying the rain, the sound of it, the sense of it. He saw the hills shrouded, saw lonely birds fly low against the background of unimaginative sky. He would turn fretfully upon the pillow, waking early. Already he was sick of the smell of those sheets so heavily lavendered by Mother Trip. There was a fatuous manner of innocence to lavender.

Every morning Amoore would recall that night of his return; would cherish the madcap memory of that grand stride across the hills; would live again that moonlit moment when, once more, he had kissed Comfort, out there in her scented garden. He asked himself—he was always asking—whether it would not have been better had he made that ring at her door a runaway ring. Feelings of that swift sort never led you wrong.

"I could just as well have ducked down behind a shrub," he moaned to his pillow, then shook and thumped it, searching for an easier place.

He was committed to Comfort. They had arranged to get married soon, and they were going to Canada for their honeymoon. She wanted to study farming methods over there, and he wanted to feel what a big country was like.

He was naturally a great deal in Comfort's company. He talked to her, being the sort of person who must tell things. He knew all the time, whether he spoke of noble dreamings or owned to mean deeds, that she remained oblivious. Now and again he, perhaps, assaulted her simplicities, and he grew to loathe her clear glance and slow smile. They made him feel unclean.

He went with Comfort upon her charitable rounds. She was doing—the dear thing—what her mother and her grandmother had done before her. To go round with a girl in a mood of stolen joy twenty-five years ago—that was one thing! To go round with a woman over forty, and certainly fat, and whom you were going to marry—that was another! Going to the cottages with her, what was it but a horrid ordeal? Matrons grinned benignly at him.

## I

ONE day he passed her stout stone farmhouse as if he were a thief; stooping, even, glancing anxiously at her rows of bright windows. Fitful winter sun was on them, just for once. He felt stealthy. He felt as he had felt when he stole behind those mean London lovers last October. He stayed up there, close by the quarry, all day, until the ragged moon arose.

He was tired and hungry. For many hours he had been walking about or sitting down on the damp, close-cropped grass, just resentfully staring. Yet he felt that there were two things he could not possibly do: one was to go and sit with Comfort in her nicely arranged drawing-room and watch her useful pink hand turn the machine handle; the other was to go and lie in his lavendered bed at the Dappled Cow. The deadly quietness of the country at night had now begun to frighten him, just as if he were a slum child down for a fortnight.

There was, perhaps, for some, abiding

happiness to be found in life. Yet certainly he had missed it. And— always comparing his feelings to actual things—he felt that he stood with his nose close to a wall. If he tried to go on—that is, if he married poor old Comfort—there would soon be no skin, no nose, no face, no man! He laughed heartily. Dolefully hills took up this mirth—and they sounded rather cracked. You cannot laugh too suddenly

Amoore stood watching the moon rise. Before this he had stood, in the same spot near the quarry, watching the sun set. The sky had been sulphur-coloured; and scornfully he muttered to it: "Simpleton! It takes a London fog to do this sort of thing properly!"

He stood looking at the irregular moon—desolate, swaying, with neither strength nor hope to him.

Yet Comfort, when at last she came to look for him, noticed nothing in particular. She was just annoyed. William did annoy you. She came along the broad, soft path of grass that made a cincture for this hill, where twenty-five years ago she and Amoore had gone mad with young love. She trod gingerly, thankful for the stout soles of her boots, afraid of slipping. She put a peevish hand on Amoore's arm.

He started savagely, and he said one word. She called it swearing, and was cross; disgusted, too.

"William! How provoking you are! I have been frightened to death. It is too bad. It looks so singular before the servants, and what will the Dappled Cow people think? I sent to ask where you were, and Mrs. Trip had not seen you since the morning."

"She didn't deny that my bed had been slept in, did she?" demanded Amoore, and he looked very wild.

The moon was on both their faces: his rent by moods, Comfort's made old by puny temper.

"Do control yourself," she said. "Have you, have you——"

"You think I've been drinking? So did Snelling. All of you people think alike. You all say, behind my back, that I'm a queer chap. But I'm not, really." He had begun angrily. "I'm just like everybody else," he insisted, and looked pathetic.

Comfort had neither eyes nor time for observation. "Come down the hill," she said, and took his arm in her firm fingers. She certainly tried to guide, direct, and control his steps. She looked perplexed, affronted, and most unhappy. Amoore noticed it all, but he no longer cared. Yet, making one last effort—and for life, as it were—he dug his heels into the wet turf, stood stock-still and drew her to him bluntly. She was now really afraid, and she looked up at the moon as you would appeal to a policeman!

"My darling, can't you realise? Oh, don't drive me too far, Comfort! Why won't you understand?" he said, with his head touching hers. "Comfort! Think of years ago. Remember, love—my dear!—it was here, just here, and I kissed you. A first kiss, an only kiss!"

"I know you did, Bill, dear. A first kiss—an only kiss! I'm glad to hear you say that; sometimes I haven't felt sure, for you talked so strangely of your bachelor life in London. But that isn't any reason—is it?—for behaving in this childish way. Let us get home as quickly as we can. My knee does hurt me so, and I may be laid up after this, for all I know. Yet I had to come myself, and come alone, for I did not want the servants to think you peculiar. You are such an odd old thing, you know."

In the moonshine he could see her smiling at him in such a calm, quite motherly way.

"I suppose I am—odd," he returned.

She heard him say this over to himself more than once as, placidly, they jogged down the hill towards her warm house. She was glad that she had brought him to his senses.

"You'll come in?" she said, as they stood at the gate. "It is rather late, but I wanted to ask your advice about several things. Have you had any supper?"

"Supper! Don't think I want any."

"But of course you do. Come in." She sounded very shocked.

He followed her docilely up the drive. She was thinking as she cautiously opened the house door how perfectly charming and easy to get on with he could be if he liked. When they stood in the cheerful hall she blinked at him. Sudden lamplight bewildered them both.

"Do you know," she said, puckering up her fresh face, "that I don't believe the harness-room is locked. Would you mind going to the back and see?"

"I'll go; of course I'll go." Amoore turned quickly away, as if he were glad to go. Then he came just as swiftly back.

" Dear darling Comfort," he said, most tenderly, " you'll be glad to be married, won't you ? "

He knew so mournfully that this was the strongest feeling left in her : the desire to be a married woman. She was of the type and station which thinks celibacy carries some faint disgrace. She wished at last to assert herself, to be a matron among matrons As to yellow flowers in the cup of a quarry, and to petunias more deeply wine-tinted than wine—and to the kisses which came as you stood by such blossoms—what did Comfort know or care ! Moments of that sort made her feel a fool, just as, indulgently she knew her lover to be one.

" Of course I shall be glad, my dear," she said, sincerely, " and glad, too, when all the fuss is over. Don't cuddle me out in the hall like this, Willie. It isn't "—she sniggered, and he hated her suddenly—" safe."

Those two words—cuddle and safe ! Amoore would have cut out all tongues that said them !

" I'll go out and lock the harness-room," he said. Comfort could not see his face, but it was flaming.

The door of the harness-room was wide open, and the moon was winking in on bits of well-rubbed brass. He stood in the room, looking at the harness. Out there across the iron fence in a paddock Comfort's old mare was munching. She, too, was old, yet she was happy—out there to grass, getting fatter every day. Did you ask other things of life ?

" You are happy ; but I haven't got the trick somehow, my sweet. It is all trick," Amoore said, speaking very gently to the beast, and as if he spoke to Comfort.

Over a beam in the harness-room hung that careless rope. Now who had hung it there, and when, and why ? Eloquent hands, anyway ! Amoore looked at it, touched it, tested it. And he thought that he had quite made up his mind.

It might really be less trouble to put that bit of rope —a soft rope, rather frayed, and would it hold ?—about your neck than to go on feeling so surprisingly bored. To walk about the world, a dead man, paralysed of the soul—what was it ?

As he did not return to the house, Comfort again went out to look for him. She was now more annoyed than ever ; moreover, she did not go at all for some little time. Upstairs in her bedroom she had bathed her stiff knee with water as hot as she could bear.

She called out as she came, saying at sharp intervals : " William ! "

Then, stopping at the door of the harness-room, and feeling afraid, yet becoming suddenly tender to him, she faltered foolishly, " William ! Are you there ? "

There was no answer. Comfort, her pleasant voice quavering now and eloquent with all kinds of feelings—since Amoore's life and his love meant more to her than he knew—continued, quite tearfully : " It is not like you to play practical jokes. Come out."

¶

THERE was no reply. There was nothing but a wide-awake twinkle upon all those carefully rubbed points of brass in the harness that hung upon the wall : that, and the bitter munching of the mare.

The door was flung back. Shivering, Comfort stepped in at last. She looked quickly about her, and the arrogant glitter which so constantly had gleamed in her eyes of late died down. Amoore, with his trick of comparison, would have said, had he seen, that arrogance merely peeled away, revealing a lovelier and a more lofty light which had been burning behind all the time. Comfort —with the moon—stood marking Amoore.

Now the moon was an elfish thing, and constantly led men astray. It had played Amoore a trick last October ; it was not steadfast this January night. For his mood had changed, and the quality which made him for ever deviate and fall far short had saved his life now.

" Didn't you hear me call ? " asked Comfort, and her voice was chill with horror. For she saw what he held in his hand.

" Oh yes, I heard, and I wouldn't answer," he returned foolishly.

As he spoke he let the end fall from his fingers, and the rope again swung, looking flippant, from the beam.

" Billy ! " Comfort seemed to sob. She realised. She was not stupid any more, but very tender ; there had been in her from the first more insight than Amoore suspected. He looked at her. At first it was a dull, cold look, and one almost of enmity ; then slowly it lighted. For he suddenly found in Comfort certain depths where, before, he had surmised there were only shallows. She stepped up close to him, put her arms round his neck, her head

upon his wide shoulder, and he felt that she was crying.

"You thought," she asked, almost contemptuously, "that I did not understand you all this time?"

"What, dear, what?" he asked, at once, breathlessly. Was it possible that all along *he* had not understood *her?*

"Why, the disappointment," said Comfort, her voice sounding muffled and very piteous. "Don't you think that it is the same for us both, and as bad for me as for you, when we are past forty?"

Here was a link between them and fast forged; it was the link of suffering.

Amoore lifted up her head and looked at her. "Tell me what you feel," he said, very simply.

"Being an old maid and what it means to me," she returned frankly. "That is what I feel. All the years, Billy; nobody looking at me twice, nobody asking me. Other girls getting married quite as a matter of course. Ethel and Mamie and even little Joan—settling down and having children, all of them, with a man and a home of their very own. It would never have been so bad if you had not kissed me by the quarry that night and made me understand. Just to be an aunt," she proceeded with a mournfulness that broke Amoore's heart and bound him to her, "when you longed to be a mother. If I had been a man and could have gone out into the world! But to be a woman and just to stay here. It hardly seemed worth while to be a woman at all. I'm saying it all to you to-night—the things I've felt and cried about and have hardly put into words and never thought to say. Then you returned that night. What it meant to me! And I could see that you felt I was thinking more of the sewing-machine than of you." At this touch Amoore flinched, and he rejoiced. For she had understood him, in a sense, all along.

"We were old, too old, for all that we had been wanting," Comfort was saying to him, wisely. "You tried to bring it back, to pretend that we were young, and I could not help feeling that it made us seem ridiculous. But, oh my darling, there must be something even better left for you and for me, because we have waited so long and wanted so much."

She put her head down again, her mood of eloquence over. Probably never any more would she be eloquent. Yet she had spoken to-night, and, speaking, had assured herself with Amoore. He could feel the quiver of her passionate crying, there upon his shoulder, while the white mare munched, and the moon looked sardonically in at this vastly-changed scene.

"Yes," he said, quietly; "there must be, and there is. Don't cry. We will go and find it."

# THE ARGOSY VOTING COMPETITION

WE again offer two prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the readers who send in the titles of the four best stories in the order of merit which most nearly coincides with the votes of the majority. Stories must be selected from this issue. The Editor's decision will be final.

Entries should be made on postcards addressed to: "Vote," THE ARGOSY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4 (Comp.), and sent in by November 28, 1927. The result will be announced in THE ARGOSY for FEBRUARY.

We have pleasure in awarding a prize of Two Guineas to MRS. A. T. WILSON, 96, Spottiswoode Street, Edinburgh; and a prize of One Guinea to JAS. RENNISON, Esq., Sinnington, York—as the result of the competition for November.

# *The Moonlight Sonata*

By HUMBERT WOLFE

I HAVE had great gifts—the cool clear brow of a queen
that for a moment was mine to crown from afar,
hands for a moment outstretched for mine to rest between,
as in the hands of his love the hands of the lover are.

Well! she has tired of the crown. Do you think I shall blame her?
She has folded her hands together. Shall I protest?
She has only done those things that well became her
at the time and in the way that they became her best.

What more should I ask of life than thus to have shared
Beethoven's thrill, when, waking from a swoon, light
flooded his mind, and he found on the sheet prepared
a hand had written the final chords of "The Moonlight"?

He did not say to the music "Why did you desert me?
You were mine and are mine no longer. It is over."
And I, when I wake, shall I complain that she hurt me
who is now for no man, but for all men, the lover?

For like the Sonata she has passed out of my mind
in loveliness completed, and though I cannot mould her
with the master's stroke in music's eternal kind,
I shall hold her for ever, because I did not hold her.

She is a queen in the moment of crowning transfigured,
a lover in the hushed instant when the first kiss assuages
the heart's long trouble, and how shall my heart be beggared
now that my love with her beauty belongs to the ages?

# Snorkey Timms, His Marks

*The humours of a dark night's work in Houndsditch*

**By ARTHUR MORRISON**

THIS is another tale of Snorkey Timms, the disreputable acquaintance of whom I have written in other places. It is now years since I saw Snorkey, and I never had the faintest excuse for such an acquaintanceship, except that he was an amusing scoundrel and full of information that cannot be derived from any person of the smallest respectability.

It was at a time long after Snorkey's adventure with the bags of bricks at Liverpool Street, of which I have told elsewhere, after he had told it me in a faro-house at Whitechapel; the time, in fact, was when the banker at that same faro-table was the envy of Snorkey's soul and his ideal of sublunary good fortune. From Snorkey's point of view, indeed, there was reason. Snorkey was a mere Cockney picker-up of trifles—and other things—that were not too carefully watched; Mr. Issy Marks during the day was a wholesale merchant with a fancy-goods warehouse in a little turning out of Houndsditch, and in the evening he sat at the receipt of custom at the faro-den, the only man at the table who always won. Indeed, he paid the proprietor fifteen shillings an hour for the privilege of sitting banker, and made a very handsome thing of it on the top of that. Why Snorkey and others like him should have persisted in contributing nightly to Mr. Issy Marks's income was not a question easily to be resolved by the impartial observer; the language wherewith they signalized their regular losses wholly precluded the supposition that they did it out of sheer benevolence to Mr. Marks. Yet they were far from being fools in the ordinary sense, and, in fact, were rather apt to pride themselves on their general knowingness; still they came, stood before the eight squares chalked on the table, saw their stakes decrease and vanish by a system which plainly and obviously must benefit the banker all through and nobody else, went away poor and angry, and came again the next night and all the nights after that to lose more money. There was no reason in it, but there was the phenomenon, and Mr. Marks did very well out of it, as did many another "banker" in many another gambling-house in those parts.

For this, and for the presumed wealth in the fancy-goods business, Mr. Issy Marks was regarded with much envy. The business had its place in a humpbacked little old house that stood uncomfortably shouldered and squeezed between two larger buildings, not so old but quite as dirty, in a rather grimy little street that led from Houndsditch to some undiscovered region beyond. There were scores of such places thereabout, with huddled little thick-framed windows, wherein flashy cheap china ornaments, framed oleographs, combs on cards of a dozen, shell-covered boxes, brushes, sponges, and a hundred such things tumbled loose among cardboard boxes. These establishments were the small wholesale concerns which supplied still smaller retail shops in the eastern and southern suburbs. There were bigger houses among them than Mr. Marks's, and busier; but his had the reputation—at least among his humble admirers—of carrying a solid trade of the sort called "snug."

Now it was the quaint and interesting custom of Snorkey, and all his friends of like habits, to inspect very often, and with loving care, the premises of prosperous persons who aroused their respect and envy as Mr. Marks had done Snorkey's. They counted the windows and speculated on the probable interior fastenings of doors. They peeped through keyholes unobserved, affectionately patted shutters, and groped inquiringly about their iron fastenings. Their kindly interest even extended to the houses adjoining, the roofs, ladders, trapdoors, and possible means of intercommunications. They have been known to stand in cold streets for hours watching the lights on the window-blinds that screened the

objects of their solicitude, and even the most careless of them never omitted to make sympathetic, if unostentatious, inquiries as to the comings and goings of the inmates, and the exact positions of their sleeping apartments.

Snorkey, therefore, was aware that Mr. Issy Marks's warehouse was locked up and left to itself at night. He knew, also, that the back of the place could be reached from a paved alley by the scaling of an easy wall; that packing-cases littered the back yard; and that any person standing on one or two of the largest could reach a window that was not barred. Such things as these were always among the first noticed by Snorkey in any house in which he took an intelligent interest. And, as regards this particular house, observation had taught him other things also. For instance, although the stock generally was not of a costly description, there was a good deal of cheap, thin, showy silver, which would melt down just as well as the same metal in heavier and more expensively finished pieces. There was a little safe in the back room on the ground floor, and there was all the possibility of a little jewellery. On the whole, Snorkey decided that he had fallen in love with Mr. Marks's warehouse, and must take an early opportunity to scrape a closer acquaintance.

The opportunity, in fact, seemed to be occurring every night; so that between the moment when Snorkey fully realized the state of his affections and the evening on which he seized his opportunity very few hours elapsed.

It was Mr. Marks's habit to bolt and bar his warehouse at seven each evening, and bid it and its business farewell till the next morning; for he lived at Mile End. On the evening of Snorkey's venture he left as usual, and Snorkey, from a convenient entry, saw him go. So much being ascertained, the adventurer loitered for an hour amid the society of the Three Tuns, and then leisurely took his way to the faro "club."

This place was reached by way of an innocent-looking door, with a very respectable electric bell, at the end of a little court of newly built offices and shops. If you were known, the door instantly opened to your ring; if you were not, you might ring the battery down without effect. That was because the door-keeper sat on a pair of steps within, with his eye near the fanlight. Snorkey Timms was no stranger, and with no more delay than sufficed for the silent opening and closing of the door, and a careful groping through a long passage, he emerged into the light and noise of the gaming-room. Mr. Marks was there as usual, with a cigar in his mouth, his hat at the back of his head, and his eyes on the cards he was shuffling and dealing on the table before him. An eager little crowd was clubbed thickly round the other three sides of the table, the rear rank climbing on the backs of the ranks before them, every man with his hand thrust out to its fullest reach, following the fortunes of his stake where it lay on the chalked diagram, and eager to snatch at the winnings that came so sparsely.

Snorkey staked a shilling, partly because he was always ready to gamble, and partly because, in view of the possible events of the night, it was not "the game" to make himself conspicuous by a change in his usual habits on this particular evening. The shilling went into Mr. Marks's heap, followed quickly by another, and two more, and some others after that.

"Banker's 'avin' all the luck again," remarked a friend to Snorkey. "Turns up the card with the most agin it every time, an' 'e's halved stakes eight times since I come in."

Snorkey tried a double chance with two shillings, and lost them in successive turns.

"No good—it's givin' 'im yer money to-night," remarked the friend. "There's a chap over here's bin puttin' down half quids and quids, and never savin' a stake. Marks's luck's in to-night."

As a fact, the banker's luck always is in at faro, but to-night it was favouring him so well that even the punters noticed it; and punters at faro must either be blind in general to the banker's luck or take it as a matter of course. As his loose silver dwindled and Mr. Marks's heap of money rose, Snorkey grew the more resolved on his project for the night, and more and more persuaded that his claim on the Marks estate was a justifiable and, indeed, almost a legal one.

He stayed about the faro-table till near eleven, and then sauntered quietly out. It was scarce more than five minutes' walk to the house by Houndsditch, and the street, the warehouse, and the alley behind were all quiet and dark. But there was a light in a top window in the house to the left of

Marks's, and, as Snorkey had the whole night before him for his adventure, he waited and took a turn about the streets to kill time.

When he returned it was nearer twelve than eleven, and the lodger in the next house was in bed. Snorkey wasted no more time, but hurried into the paved alley and scaled the wall.

Mr. Marks's back yard was an uncomfortable place to traverse by night, short as the distance was; for unseen boxes and cases met the shins and knuckles of the explorer, and, while the quietest possible progress involved some amount of noise, there was always the danger of knocking over something with a thunderous clatter.

Snorkey was cautious and slow, for there was no need to hurry. He reached the wall of the house and stood to listen. It was a still night—too still for such an enterprise as Snorkey's; small sounds were very clear. But then if every burglar refused to work except in perfect conditions, the whole industry would come to a standstill.

There was no sound to cause uneasiness. There was the tread of a policeman, of course, but that was reassuring. It is a pleasant sound in the ear of a burglar, audible for an enormous distance, giving him confidence; when he cannot hear it he is never sure that the policeman isn't watching him. This friendly sound came from Houndsditch, harmoniously beating time for the now subdued hum of London. The sky was clear and cloudless above, though dark; and a few stars looked down on Snorkey's experiment and winked encouragingly.

It is not easy to set one rough packing-case firmly on another, on a dark night, without noise; and when you have done it, even with a little noise, it is still more difficult to climb on the top case without a great deal more noise still, and more than a chance of a clamorous tumble. But these difficulties were surmounted, and once the window was reached, that offered no difficulties at all. For Snorkey had brought his tools. First, a catch-'em-alive-oh paper, doubled inward, so as to go safely in the pocket. This, being carefully opened out, was spread over the pane nearest the sash fastening and smacked in the middle with the flat hand. The pane was abolished, and came away in a hundred fragments, all sticking to the paper, and all quiet. Then it needed but the insertion of a hand to open the catch, and the window was conquered.

Snorkey climbed in, shut the window quietly, and pulled down the blind—a thing that Mr. Marks had neglected. Then he produced some more tools. First, a lantern made of nothing but a little tin box with a stump of candle in it, so that light was only thrown where it was needed, and a puff would quench it.

Now when the scrap of candle was lit, the first thing revealed to his sight was not at all what Snorkey was looking for. It was, in fact, a heap of shavings on the floor—wet shavings. It was partly under a table which was piled above with cardboard boxes, many of them broken. The boxes seemed damp, too, and when Snorkey approached to examine them he grew aware of a distinct smell of paraffin oil. There was nothing in the boxes, it would seem, but more shavings; and paper—also wet. Snorkey's eyebrows lifted and his lips pursed. But he saved the whistle for a future occasion.

¶

HE looked about the room. The walls were lined with shelves and stacked with boxes, but there seemed very little in the boxes. Mr. Marks appeared to be stocking a deal of straw and dirty paper. Also shavings, again. But there was one box of hair-brushes which much interested Snorkey. He knew that Marks sold many of these cheap, silver-backed hair-brushes whereof the silver covering behind, thin as paper, was stamped into much highly relieved ornament, with a view to a spurious massiveness of appearance; and he had designed to rip off those silver backs with a jack-knife and roll them up for easier transport. Well, here were the very brushes. But the silver backs had been ripped off already!

Snorkey dropped the lid on the box and saved up another whistle. Then he went out on the landing (where there were more shavings) and down the narrow stairs, almost into another heap of shavings at the bottom. He made straight for the little safe, pulling from his inner coat pocket as he went the "stick," whose Christian name is James or Jemmy.

It was an elegant little weapon, with a fine chisel end, and he began by thrusting that chisel end in the crack of the door near the top. There are some of

these cheap safes from which you may tear off the outer plate of the door in this very elementary way. This however, did not seem to be one of them, for the immediate result was nothing but the breaking of a fragment from the point of the "James."

Snorkey gazed ruefully at the broken point—for the tool was a borrowed one—and then gave a twist to the cross handle in the middle of the door. The safe was unlocked!

The door swung open and disclosed account-books and nothing else. At the bottom were two little drawers, which were certainly locked, but came open with bent fronts at the first wrench of the "stick." They were empty.

Snorkey looked round the room and shook his head despondently. There was a perfect wealth of common shell boxes and cheap sponges here, but that was not the sort of wealth he had come for. The room also had its heap of shavings, piled against a stack of the shell boxes, and a three-gallon can of paraffin oil stood near it.

He entered the shop very quietly, for now he might be heard from the street. The stock he disregarded, but tried the till. It contained not so much as a button. Clearly this was not the venture Snorkey had looked for. He shook his head again and returned to the back room. Then he very deliberately pocketed his tools, blew out his candle-light, and sat on the stairs to wait for Mr. Marks. For he had seen things that made him expect him.

It was very quiet, and more than a little dull. But presently the humour of the situation so presented itself to Snorkey that the silence was broken by a chuckle, which grew into something rather like a snigger. Mr. Marks would find an unexpected card had turned up, this deal!

The church clocks began to strike twelve, some near, some far, and presently St. Botolph's, clanging loud and close. In the midst of the strokes there was a thump at the front door. Startling for the moment, but only a policeman testing the fastenings. His receding tramp was quite clear, now that the clocks had ceased to strike.

Mr. Marks was very slow, and more than once Snorkey was in danger of falling asleep. He was listening for the stroke of one, and wondering if he might already have missed it by dozing, when at last there came the expected click in the lock and with extraordinary suddenness Marks was in the shop with the door closed behind him. Plainly he must have been watching his opportunity, and had reached the door and turned the familiar lock swiftly and quietly. And in another moment he was groping in the back room, within two yards of his visitor.

Snorkey felt for his matches and his lantern; but as he did so a match was struck in the middle of the room, and revealed Marks in the act of lighting a lantern of his own. Snorkey waited till the flame was well established and the lantern closed, and then said cheerfully: "Ah! good mornin', Mr. Marks!"

With a bounce and a faint yelp, Mr, Marks sprang back against a pile of boxes, livid and gasping, with a terrified whimper in his throat.

"All right, Mr. Marks! Don't jump! It's only me! Quite a old friend!" And Snorkey lifted the lantern and held it by the side of his face, whereon flickered something vastly like a grin.

"Vat d'you—d'you vant?" gasped Marks, panting with the shock. "Vat d'you vant?"

"Want to give meself up," answered Snorkey crisply. "Burglary—breakin' an' enterin'; I'm a 'orrid criminal. I broke in."

Marks gulped twice before he got a word out. "You broke in?" he repeated.

"Burglariously busted your back window, an' been waitin' 'ere about an hour an' a 'alf to confess. I've repented."

"You—you—vat?"

"I've repented. Anybody would as didn't come for shavings. If I'd wanted shavings I'd ha' made a good stroke o' business to-night; shavings, or waste paper, or paraffin. Not wantin' 'em, I've repented. Lock me up."

Mr. Marks clapped his hand distractedly to the side of his head. "You go—go avay!" he said.

Snorkey shook his head, put down the lantern, and sat on the edge of the table. "Couldn't think of it," he said. "Couldn't think o' goin' away now, after all the wickedness I've committed. My conscience wouldn't stand it. You fetch the p'lice an' 'ave me punished proper."

Mr. Marks looked up and down the room and towards the shop and up the stairs, thoughtfully. The shock of surprise was passing, to be succeeded by a desperate perplexity.

" All right," he said at length. " I don't vant to punish you. You can go."

" No, no," Snorkey replied cordially. " Don't you let your feelings get worked on, Mr. Marks. You dunno what a 'orrid chap I've bin. O' course I've repented now, but that was only 'cos of the shavings. You can't rightly count a repentance 'cos of shavings—not by the proper rules."

" Go along," answered Marks, with a furtive lowering of voice. " I tell you I von't say noddin' about it. Ve understand each other."

Snorkey shook his head. " I doubt it, Mr. Marks," he sighed. " It ain't easy for a gent like you to understand a thorough wrong 'un like me ; anyhow, it seems a bit 'ard this time. You don't mean to say you forgive me—goin' to take mercy on me ? "

" Yes. Go on."

" Mr. Marks, you're a nobleman. I'm willin' enough. I can be took mercy on, on very reasonable terms. My little—er—commission, as you might say, for bein' forgiven, ought to be about fifty quid, I should say, this time."

" Vat ? "

" Fifty quid, I said. You see, it wants rather a lot o' forgiveness for a burglary as wicked as this. The drawers in your safe's all bent anyhow, an' your first-floor back window's quite shockin'."

" You've got a fine cheek," snarled Mr. Marks, by this time much recovered. " Vy you expect me to pay anyting ? You're lucky not to be took up ! "

" What I said meself ! " replied Snorkey. " Fetch the p'lice. Or I'll go an' fetch 'em if you like."

" No, no ! But fifty quid's ridic'luth ! Besides, I got no money here ! "

" All right ; I'll wait here for it till the mornin'. It's warmer 'ere than out in the cold, unfeelin' streets."

" No, no ! You must go ! Now, come, be reathonable, Mr. Thnorkey. I'll see you to-morrow an' make it all right. Tholemn vord I vill ! "

Snorkey winked, and shook his head inexorably. " You don't understand the wicked feelin's of a 'ardened criminal, Mr. Marks. D'ye know, I'm sunk that low I wouldn't take your word for it ! I wouldn't ! Shockin', ain't it ? "

" But fifty's out o' reathon ! It'th abthurd ! "

" Well, beat me down, Mr. Marks. Offer me forty."

" No, no—ridicl'uth. I've got a quid vid me ; p'r'aps thirty bob."

" Ridic'lous, too, ain't it ? Why, I've broke the point of a tool as is worth as much as that. And if I 'adn't turned up, the place might 'a' bin afire ! It might, the dangerous way things like paraffin is left about ! It might 'a' broke out any minute if it 'adn't bin for me."

" I'll give ye five quid, come ! "

" Can't be done at the price. My conscience won't allow it ; it's a special good conscience, is mine ! It comes a lot dearer than that."

" But ven I've got no more, vat can I do ? "

" Just now you 'adn't got no more than thirty bob ; now it's growed to five quid. If I stop 'ere you'll be a millionaire by the mornin', Mr. Marks, Esquire, an' all through me. I'll stop."

" No, no ; be a thport, Mr. Thnorkey, an' give a man a chance. Vat'll you take—reathonable ? "

" Ah, you see, it's growed a bit more already. I said it would. You'd better let me stop, for your own sake. But if you'd really rather not, why, I think I can make a better guess at what you've got on you than you can yourself. If you've got five quid, an' a bit more, on ye, it means you 'aven't took your winnin's home from the club yet. You always change the silver afore you come away, I know. I guess twenty quid. If there's more—why, you can keep it for your honesty. But that's my charge—ab-so ! "

Time was going, and as a fact the sum in Mr. Marks's pockets was well above his tormentor's estimate. He thought for a moment, looked into Snorkey's eyes with a gaze of agonized reproach, turned his back, and counted out the money in gold. Then he turned again with a sigh and paid it over.

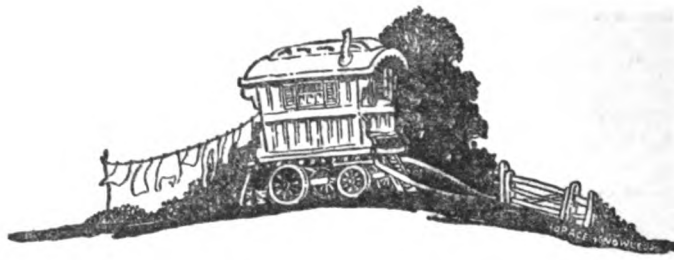
" He seemed quite out o' temper payin' over that little bit," Snorkey said, long afterward, relating the adventure. " Quite rusty 'e was. 'Adn't got what you might call a sense of 'umour. I s'pose. Some people ain't. But I told 'im very cheerful to be careful about strikin' matches an' such, with all them com—combustious things about, an' I come away.

" I come down the street, an' turned into Houndsditch, an' there what should I see but a fire-alarm post. You know where it is—just at the corner. Well, you know,

## Snorkey Timms, His Marks

I felt a bit nervous about Mr. Marks. It was a dangerous kind o' place for anybody to be about in with a light, an' somehow I 'ad a 'orrid sort o' presentiment that the 'ouse might catch afire after all. You know the way one o' them presentiments gets 'old of you, sometimes. Well, this 'ere one o' mine was that strong that I took my chance with the alarm. I smashed the glass, an' I tugged the 'andle till I very near tugged it out, an' then I ran 'ome fast, 'cos it was late.

"An' the most re-markable co-in-*ci*dence about the 'ole thing was—when the fire-engines got round there, there *was* a fire! There was, on my solemn davy! Wasn't it wonderful? An' Mr. Marks got in sich a muddle explainin' 'ow the accident 'appened that they gave him two years hard!"



## *The Feminine Way*

MAN may talk as much as he pleases; the spoken word exerts no potent influence over a genuine woman. So long as her emotions are strongly affected, the whole line of argumentation to which the word gives expression seems to her but a piece of academical man-invented pedantry—the learned twaddle of the schools. She inclineth not her ear to *reasons*; she considers them an intolerable imposition, an encroachment upon the realm of her sentiment and the supremacy of her feminine intuition. Her logic is passion; she feels but her mood, her interest; she sees things and relations but as they regard her personally. Whether there is an injustice to others implied, and what is the true import of things *per se*, all that is rarely comprehended and retained by a woman where her interest or her antipathy comes into play. In the entire course of the clearest and concisest exposition the fair listener is occupied only with her excitement and opposition, and never with the subject in question and its importance. The spoken word, as soon as she is required to acknowledge its office as bearer and representative of spirit, to value its absolute potency, is to her but empty sound. At the last she yields to pathos—to emphasis, to oratory, as she might do in a play. The dialectic affect her possibly by their eloquence, diction, and plastic qualities, rarely by the force of conviction. When all his arguments are exhausted, and the speaker looks forward to the effect for the sake of which he has marshalled all his rhetorical art and logic, and taken his eloquence into both hands as it were, Madam comes back to the same fatal point, to the same nonsense from whence she started; and all the forces of rhetoric, all the concentrated reasoning goes for nothing.

BOGUMIL GOLZ.

# Concerning the Christmas Argosy

## *By The Editor*

THE next issue of the *ARGOSY*, to be published on December 2, will be the enlarged Christmas number. The special contents will maintain the successful policy of presenting only what is indisputably best in the field of good fiction—a course from which I have in no way deviated since the *ARGOSY* was first launched nearly two years ago.

The fame of this magazine has steadily grown among a discriminating public because there always has been, and always will be, general loyalty from readers who recognise sincerity of purpose. I have never underestimated the appreciation and judgment of those whose support has made possible the continued success of this magazine; and on this basis I shall continue to work. I have already presented, in serial form, two outstanding masterpieces of fiction. In the Christmas number I shall begin the third:

"THE WOMAN IN WHITE,"
By *WILKIE COLLINS.*

This is not only Wilkie Collins' greatest novel; it is also the parent of all English novels in which a "mystery" is skilfully concealed until the end, while every page reveals a puzzling though natural intricacy in the plot. "THE WOMAN IN WHITE" is more than a mystery tale—it is an engrossing human document in which the characterisation is so brilliant as to invite comparison with the best work of Dickens and Balzac.

* * * * *

Another special feature of the enlarged issue will be a new One-act Play, specially written for the Christmas *ARGOSY*, entitled

"A TRAVELLER RETURNS," by *CLEMENCE DANE.*

This little play, apart from its merits, is published to meet the new demand for printed stage works, a demand which has frequently been met by this magazine.

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In the restricted space at my disposal I can mention but a proportion of the established short story writers whose work will appear in the same number:—

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|---|---|
| *ARNOLD BENNETT* | *GILBERT PARKER* |
| *I. A. R. WYLIE* | *W. W. JACOBS* |
| *BRET HARTE* | *ALEX. PUSHKIN* |
| *MISS BRADDON* | *THEODOR STORM* |
| *O. HENRY* | *DOSTOEVSKI* |
| *MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES* | *CHARLES DICKENS* |

The price of this special, enlarged number will be One Shilling and Sixpence, and I would advise readers to place an advance order to save any risk of disappointment.

# Olalla

## By R. L. STEVENSON

**In presenting this series great pains have been taken to select stories revealing a variety of motives in harmony with the theme of love. In the story the sacrificial element which, in some form or other, is inseparable from the passion of love, is treated in a masterly and strikingly original manner. It is doubtful if R. L. Stevenson ever created a finer or more convincing woman character than that of the ardent yet unflinchingly scrupulous Olalla.—*Ed.***

"NOW," said the doctor, "my part is done, and, I may say, with some vanity, well done. It remains only to get you out of this cold and poisonous city and to give you two months of a pure air and an easy conscience. The last is your affair. To the first I think I can help you. It falls indeed rather oddly; it was but the other day the Padre came in from the country; and as he and I are old friends, although of contrary professions, he applied to me in a matter of distress among some of his parishioners. This was a family—but you are ignorant of Spain, and even the names of our grandees are hardly known to you; suffice it, then, that they were once great people, and are now fallen to the brink of destitution. Nothing now belongs to them but the residencia, and certain leagues of desert mountain, in the greater part of which not even a goat could support life. But the house is a fine old place, and stands at a great height among the hills, and most salubriously; and I had no sooner heard my friend's tale, than I remembered you. I told him I had a wounded officer, wounded in the good cause, who was now able to make a change; and I proposed that his friends should take you for a lodger. Instantly the Padre's face grew dark, as I had maliciously foreseen it would. It was out of the question, he said. Then let them starve, said I, for I have no sympathy with tatterdemalion pride. Thereupon we separated, not very content with one another, but yesterday, to my wonder, the Padre returned and made a submission: the difficulty, he said, he had found upon inquiry to be less than he had feared; or, in other words, these proud people had put their pride in their pocket. I closed with the offer; and, subject to your approval I have taken rooms for you in the residencia. The air of these mountains will renew your blood; and the quiet in which you will there live is worth all the medicines in the world."

"Doctor," said I, "you have been throughout my good angel, and your advice is a command. But tell me, if you please, something of the family with which I am to reside."

"I am coming to that," replied my friend; "and, indeed, there is a difficulty in the way. These beggars are, as I have said, of very high descent and swollen with the most baseless vanity; they have lived for some generations in a growing isolation, drawing away, on either hand, from the rich who had now become too high for them, and from the poor, whom they still regarded as too low; and even to-day, when poverty forces them to unfasten their door to a guest, they cannot do so without a most ungracious stipulation. You are to remain, they say, a stranger; they will give you attendance, but they refuse from the first the idea of the smallest intimacy."

I will not deny that I was piqued, and perhaps the feeling strengthened my desire to go, for I was confident that I could break down that barrier if I desired. "There is nothing offensive in such a stipulation," said I; "and I even sympathise with the feeling that inspired it."

"It is true they have never seen you," returned the doctor politely; "and if they knew you were the handsomest and the most pleasant man that ever came from England (where I am told that handsome men are common, but pleasant ones not so much so), they would doubtless make you welcome with a better grace. But since you take the thing so well, it matters not. To me, indeed, it seems discourteous. But you will find yourself the gainer. The family will not much tempt you. A mother, a son and a daughter; an old woman said to be half-witted, a country lout, and a country girl, who stands very high with her confessor, and

is, therefore," chuckled the physician, "most likely plain; there is not much in that to attract the fancy of a dashing officer."

"And yet you say they are high-born," I objected.

"Well, as to that, I should distinguish," returned the doctor. "The mother is; not so the children. The mother was the last representative of a princely stock, degenerate both in parts and fortune. Her father was not only poor, he was mad; and the girl ran wild about the residencia till his death. Then, much of the fortune having died with him, and the family being quite extinct, the girl ran wilder than ever, until at last she married, Heaven knows whom, a muleteer some say, others a smuggler; while there are some who uphold there was no marriage at all, and that Felipe and Olalla are bastards. The union, such as it was, was tragically dissolved some years ago; but they live in such seclusion, and the country at that time was in so much disorder, that the precise manner of the man's end is known only to the priest—if even to him."

"I begin to think I shall have strange experiences," said I.

"I would not romance, if I were you," replied the doctor; "you will find, I fear, a very grovelling and commonplace reality. Felipe, for instance, I have seen. And what am I to say? He is very rustic, very cunning, very loutish, and, I should say, an innocent; the others are probably to match. No, no, señor commandante, you must seek congenial society among the great sights of our mountains; and in these at least, if you are at all a lover of the works of nature, I promise you will not be disappointed."

The next day Felipe came for me in a rough country cart, drawn by a mule; and a little before the stroke of noon, after I had said farewell to the doctor, the innkeeper, and different good souls who had befriended me during my sickness, we set forth out of the city by the eastern gate, and began to ascend into the Sierra. I had been so long a prisoner, since I was left behind for dying after the loss of the convoy, that the mere smell of the earth set me smiling. The country through which we went was wild and rocky, partially covered with rough woods, now of the cork-tree, and now of the great Spanish chestnut, and frequently intersected by the beds of mountain torrents. The sun shone, the wind rustled joyously; and we had advanced some miles, and the city had already shrunk into an inconsiderable knoll upon the plain behind us, before my attention began to be diverted to the companion of my drive. To the eye, he seemed but a diminutive, loutish, well-made country lad, such as the doctor had described, mighty quick and active, but devoid of any culture; and this first impression was with most observers final. What began to strike me was his familiar, chattering talk; so strangely inconsistent with the terms on which I was to be received; and partly from his imperfect enunciation, partly from the sprightly incoherence of the matter, so very difficult to follow clearly without an effort of the mind. It is true I had before talked with persons of a similar mental constitution; persons who seemed to live (as he did) by the senses, taken and possessed by the visual object of the moment and unable to discharge their minds of that impression. His seemed to me (as I sat, distantly giving ear) a kind of conversation proper to drivers, who pass much of their time in a great vacancy of the intellect and threading the sights of a familiar country. But this was not the case of Felipe; by his own account, he was a homekeeper. "I wish I was there now," he said; and then spying a tree by the wayside, he broke off to tell me that he had once seen a crow among its branches.

"A crow?" I repeated, struck by the ineptitude of the remark, and thinking I had heard imperfectly.

But by this time he was already filled with a new idea; hearkening with a rapt intentness, his head on one side, his face puckered; and he struck me rudely, to make me hold my peace. Then he smiled and shook his head.

"What did you hear?" I asked.

"Oh, it is all right," he said; and began encouraging his mule with cries that echoed unhumanly up the mountain walls.

I looked at him more closely. He was superlatively well built, light, and lithe and strong; he was well-featured; his yellow eyes were very large, though, perhaps, not very expressive; take him altogether, he was a pleasant-looking lad, and I had no fault to find with him, beyond that he was of a dusky hue, and inclined to hairiness; two characteristics that I disliked. It was his mind that puzzled and yet attracted me. The doctor's phrase—an innocent—came back to me; and I was wondering if that were, after all, the true description, when the road began to go down into the narrow

and naked chasm of a torrent. The waters thundered tumultuously in the bottom; and the ravine was filled full of the sound, the thin spray, and the claps of wind, that accompanied their descent. The scene was certainly impressive; but the road was in that part very securely walled in; the mule went steadily forward; and I was astonished to perceive the paleness of terror in the face of my companion. The voice of that wild river was inconstant, now sinking lower as if in weariness, now doubling its hoarse tones; momentary freshets seemed to swell its volume, sweeping down the gorge, raving and booming against the barrier walls; and I observed it was at each of these accessions to the clamour that my driver more particularly winced and blanched. Some thoughts of Scottish superstition and the river Kelpie passed across my mind; I wondered if perchance the like were prevalent in that part of Spain; and turning to Felipe, sought to draw him out.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"O, I am afraid," he replied.

"Of what are you afraid?" I returned. "This seems one of the safest places on this very dangerous road."

"It makes a noise," he said, with a simplicity of awe that set my doubts at rest."

The lad was but a child in intellect; his mind was like his body, active and swift, but stunted in development; and I began from that time forth to regard him with a measure of pity, and to listen, at first with indulgence, and at last even with pleasure, to his disjointed babble.

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BY about four in the afternoon we had crossed the summit of the mountain line, said farewell to the western sunshine, and began to go down upon the other side, skirting the edge of many ravines and moving through the shadow of dusky woods. There rose upon all sides the voice of falling water, not condensed and formidable as in the gorge of the river, but scattered and sounding gaily and musically from glen to glen. Here, too, the spirits of my driver mended, and he began to sing aloud in a falsetto voice, and with a singular bluntness of musical perception, never true either to melody or key, but wandering at will, and yet somehow with an effect that was natural and pleasing, like that of the song of birds. As the dusk increased, I fell more and more under the spell of this artless warbling, listening and waiting for some articulate air, and still disappointed; and when at last I asked him what it was he sang: "O," cried he, "I am just singing!" Above all, I was taken with a trick he had of unweariedly repeating the same note at little intervals; it was not so monotonous as you would think, or, at least, not disagreeable; and it seemed to breathe a wonderful contentment with what is, such as we love to fancy in the attitude of trees, or the quiescence of a pool.

Night had fallen dark before we came out upon a plateau, and drew up, a little after, before a certain lump of superior blackness which I could only conjecture to be the residencia. Here, my guide, getting down from the cart, hooted and whistled for a long time in vain; until at last an old peasant man came towards us from somewhere in the surrounding dark, carrying a candle in his hand. By the light of this I was able to perceive a great arched doorway of a Moorish character: it was closed by iron studded gates, in one of the leaves of which Felipe opened a wicket. The peasant carried off the cart to some out-building; but my guide and I passed through the wicket, which was closed again behind us; and by the glimmer of the candle, passed through a court, up a stone stair, along a section of an open gallery, and up more stairs again, until we came at last to the door of a great and somewhat bare apartment. This room, which I understood was to be mine, was pierced by three windows, lined with some lustrous wood disposed in panels, and carpeted with the skins of many savage animals. A bright fire burned in the chimney, and shed abroad a changeable flicker; close up to the blaze there was drawn a table, laid for supper; and in the far end a bed stood ready. I was pleased by these preparations, and said so to Felipe; and he, with the same simplicity of disposition that I had already remarked in him, warmly re-echoed my praises. "A fine room," he said; "a very fine room. And fire, too; fire is good; it melts out the pleasure in your bones. And the bed," he continued, carrying over the candle in that direction—"see what fine sheets—how soft, how smooth, smooth"; and he passed his hand again and again over their texture, and then laid down his head and rubbed his cheeks among them with a grossness of content that somehow offended me. I took the candle from his hand (for I feared

he would set the bed on fire) and walked back to the supper-table, where, perceiving a measure of wine, I poured out a cup and called to him to come and drink of it. He started to his feet at once and ran to me with a strong expression of hope; but when he saw the wine, he visibly shuddered.

"Oh no," he said, "not that; that is for you. I hate it."

"Very well, Señor," said I; "then I will drink to your good health, and to the prosperity of your house and family. Speaking of which," I added, after I had drunk, "shall I not have the pleasure of laying my salutations in person at the feet of the Señora, your mother?"

But at these words all the childishness passed out of his face, and was succeeded by a look of indescribable cunning and secrecy. He backed away from me at the same time, as though I were an animal about to leap or some dangerous fellow with a weapon, and when he had got near the door, glowered at me sullenly with contracted pupils. "No," he said at last, and the next moment was gone noiselessly out of the room; and I heard his footing die away downstairs as light as rainfall, and silence closed over the house.

After I had supped I drew up the table nearer to the bed and began to prepare for rest; but in the new position of the light, I was struck by a picture on the wall. It represented a woman, still young. To judge by her costume and the mellow unity which reigned over the canvas, she had long been dead; to judge by the vivacity of the attitude, the eyes and the features, I might have been beholding in a mirror the image of life. Her figure was very slim and strong, and of a just proportion; red tresses lay like a crown over her brow; her eyes, of a very golden brown, held mine with a look; and her face, which was perfectly shaped, was yet marred by a cruel, sullen, and sensual expression. Something in both face and figure, something exquisitely intangible, like the echo of an echo, suggested the features and bearing of my guide; and I stood awhile, unpleasantly attracted and wondering at the oddity of the resemblance. The common, carnal stock of that race, which had been originally designed for such high dames as the one now looking on me from the canvas, had fallen to baser uses, wearing country clothes, sitting on the shaft and holding the reins of a mule cart, to bring home a lodger. Perhaps an actual link subsisted; perhaps some scruple of the delicate flesh that was once clothed upon with the satin and brocade of the dead lady, now winced at the rude contact of Felipe's frieze.

The first light of the morning shone full upon the portrait, and, as I lay awake, my eyes continued to dwell upon it with growing complacency; its beauty crept about my heart insidiously, silencing my scruples one after another; and while I knew that to love such a woman were to sign and seal one's own sentence of degeneration, I still knew that, if she were alive, I should love her. Day after day the double knowledge of her wickedness and of my weakness grew clearer. She came to be the heroine of many daydreams, in which her eyes led on to, and sufficiently rewarded, crimes. She cast a dark shadow on my fancy; and when I was out in the free air of heaven, taking vigorous exercise and healthily renewing the current of my blood, it was often a glad thought to me that my enchantress was safe in the grave, her wand of beauty broken, her lips closed in silence, her philtre split. And yet I had a half-lingering terror that she might not be dead after all, but re-arisen in the body of some descendant.

Felipe served my meals in my own apartment; and his resemblance to the portrait haunted me. At times it was not; at times, upon some change of attitude or flash of expression, it would leap out upon me like a ghost. It was above all in his ill-tempers that the likeness triumphed. He certainly liked me; he was proud of my notice, which he sought to engage by many simple and childlike devices; he loved to sit close before my fire, talking his broken talk or singing his odd, endless, wordless songs, and sometimes drawing his hand over my clothes with an affectionate manner of caressing that never failed to cause in me an embarrassment of which I was ashamed. But for all that, he was capable of flashes of causeless anger and fits of sturdy sullenness. At a word of reproof, I have seen him upset the dish of which I was about to eat, and this not surreptitiously, but with defiance; and similarly at a hint of inquisition. I was not unnaturally curious, being in a strange place and surrounded by strange people, but at the shadow of a question, he shrank back, lowering and dangerous. Then it was that, for a fraction of a second, this rough lad might have been the brother of the lady in the frame. But these humours were

swift to pass; and the resemblance died along with them.

In these first days I saw nothing of anyone but Felipe, unless the portrait is to be counted; and since the lad was plainly of weak mind, and had moments of passion, it may be wondered that I bore his dangerous neighbourhood with equanimity. As a matter of fact, it was for some time irksome; but it happened before long that I obtained over him so complete a mastery as set my disquietude at rest.

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IT fell in this way. He was by nature slothful, and much of a vagabond, and yet he kept by the house, and not only waited upon my wants, but laboured every day in the garden or small farm to the south of the residencia. Here he would be joined by the peasant whom I had seen on the night of my arrival, and who dwelt at the far end of the enclosure, about half a mile away, in a rude outhouse; but it was plain to me that, of these two, it was Felipe who did most; and though I would sometimes see him throw down his spade and go to sleep among the very plants he had been digging, his constancy and energy were admirable in themselves, and still more so since I was well assured they were foreign to his disposition and the fruit of an ungrateful effort. But while I admired, I wondered what had called forth in a lad so shuttle-witted this enduring sense of duty. How was it sustained? I asked myself; and to what length did it prevail over his instincts? The priest was possibly his inspirer; but the priest came one day to the residencia. I saw him both come and go after an interval of close upon an hour, from a knoll where I was sketching, and all that time Felipe continued to labour undisturbed in the garden.

At last, in a very unworthy spirit, I determined to debauch the lad from his good resolutions, and, waylaying him at the gate, easily persuaded him to join me in a ramble. It was a fine day, and the woods to which I led him were green and pleasant and sweet-smelling and alive with the hum of insects. Here he discovered himself in a fresh character, mounting up to heights of gaiety that abashed me, and displaying an energy and grace of movement that delighted the eye. He leaped, he ran round me in mere glee; he would stop, and look and listen, and seemed to drink in the world like a cordial; and then he would suddenly spring into a tree with one bound, and hang and gambol there like one at home. Little as he said to me, and that of not much import, I have rarely enjoyed more stirring company; the sight of his delight was a continual feast; the speed and accuracy of his movements pleased me to the heart; and I might have been so thoughtlessly unkind as to make a habit of these walks, had not chance prepared a very rude conclusion to my pleasure. By some swiftness or dexterity the lad captured a squirrel in a tree-top. He was then some way ahead of me, but I saw him drop to the ground and crouch there, crying aloud for pleasure like a child. The sound stirred my sympathies, it was so fresh and innocent; but as I bettered my pace to draw near, the cry of the squirrel knocked upon my heart. I have heard and seen much of the cruelty of lads, and above all of peasants; but what I now beheld struck me into a passion of anger. I thrust the fellow aside, plucked the poor brute out of his hands, and with swift mercy killed it. Then I turned upon the torturer, spoke to him long out of the heat of my indignation, calling him names at which he seemed to wither; and at length, pointing toward the residencia, bade him begone and leave me, for I chose to walk with men, not with vermin. He fell upon his knees, and, the words coming to him with more clearness than usual, poured out a stream of the most touching supplications, begging me in mercy to forgive him, to forget what he had done, to look to the future. "O, I try so hard," he said. "O, commandante, bear with Felipe this once; he will never be a brute again!" Thereupon, much more affected than I cared to show, I suffered myself to be persuaded, and at last shook hands with him and made it up. But the squirrel, by way of penance, I made him bury; speaking of the poor thing's beauty, telling him what pains it had suffered, and how base a thing was the abuse of strength. "See, Felipe," said I, "you are strong indeed; but in my hands you are as helpless as that poor thing of the trees. Give me your hand in mine. You cannot remove it. Now suppose that I were cruel like you, and took a pleasure in pain. I only tighten my hold, and see how you suffer." He screamed aloud, his face stricken ashy and dotted with needle-points of sweat; and when I set him free, he fell to the earth and nursed his hand and moaned

over it like a baby. But he took the lesson in good part; and whether from that, or from what I had said to him, or the higher notion he now had of my bodily strength, his original affection was changed into a dog-like, adoring fidelity.

Meanwhile I gained rapidly in health. The residencia stood on the crown of a stony plateau; on every side the mountains hemmed it about; only from the roof, where was a bartizan, there might be seen between two peaks, a small segment of plain blue, with extreme distance. The air in these altitudes moved freely and largely; great clouds congregated there, and were broken up by the wind and left in tatters on the hill-tops; a hoarse and yet faint rumbling of torrents rose from all round; and one could there study all the ruder and more ancient characters of nature in something of their pristine force. I delighted from the first in the vigorous scenery and changeful weather; nor less in the antique and dilapidated mansion where I dwelt. This was a large oblong, flanked at two opposite corners by bastion-like projections, one of which commanded the door, while both were loopholed for musketry. The lower storey was, besides, naked of windows, so that the building, if garrisoned, could not be carried without artillery. It enclosed an open court planted with pomegranate trees. From this a broad flight of marble stairs ascended to an open gallery, running all round and resting, towards the court, on slender pillars. Thence again, several enclosed stairs led to the upper storeys of the house, which were thus broken up into distinct divisions. The windows, both within and without, were closely shuttered; some of the stonework in the upper parts had fallen; the roof, in one place, had been wrecked in one of the flurries of wind which were common in these mountains; and the whole house, in the strong, beating sunlight, and standing out above a grove of stunted cork trees, thickly laden and discoloured with dust, looked like the sleeping palace of the legend.

The court, in particular, seemed the very home of slumber. A hoarse cooing of doves haunted about the eaves; the winds were excluded, but when they blew outside, the mountain dust fell here as thick as rain, and veiled the red bloom of the pomegranates; shuttered windows and the closed doors of numerous cellars, and the vacant arches of the gallery, enclosed it; and all day long the sun made broken profiles on the four sides, and paraded the shadow of the pillars on the gallery floor. At the ground level there was, however, a certain pillared recess, which bore the marks of human habitation. Though it was open in front upon the court, it was yet provided with a chimney, where a wood fire would be always prettily blazing; and the tile floor was littered with the skins of animals.

It was in this place that I first saw my hostess. She had drawn one of the skins forward and sat in the sun, leaning against a pillar. It was her dress that struck me first of all, for it was rich and brightly coloured, and shone out in that dusty courtyard with something of the same relief as the flowers of the pomegranates. At a second look it was her beauty of person that took hold of me. As she sat back—watching me, I thought, though with invisible eyes—and wearing at the same time an expression of almost imbecile good humour and contentment, she showed a perfectness of feature and a quiet nobility of attitude that were beyond a statue's. I took off my hat to her in passing, and her face puckered with suspicion as swiftly and lightly as a pool ruffles in the breeze; but she paid no heed to my courtesy. I went forth on my customary walk a trifle daunted, her idol-like impassivity haunting me; and when I returned, although she was still in much the same posture, I was half-surprised to see that she had moved as far as the next pillar, following the sunshine. This time, however, she addressed me with some trivial salutation, civilly enough conceived, and uttered in the same deep-chested, and yet indistinct and lisping tones, that had already baffled the utmost niceness of my hearing from her son. I answered rather at a venture; for not only did I fail to take her meaning with precision, but the sudden disclosure of her eyes disturbed me. They were unusually large, the iris golden like Felipe's, but the pupil at that moment so distended that they seemed almost black; and what affected me was not so much their size as (what was perhaps its consequence) the singular insignificance of their regard. A look more blankly stupid I have never met. My eyes dropped before it even as I spoke, and I went on my way upstairs to my own room, at once already baffled and embarrassed. Yet, when I came there

and saw the face of the portrait, I was again reminded of the miracle of family descent. My hostess was, indeed, both older and fuller in person; her eyes were of a different colour; her face, besides, was not only free from the ill-significance that offended and attracted me in the painting; it was devoid of either good or bad—a moral blank expressing literally naught. And yet there was a likeness, not so much speaking as immanent, not so much in any particular feature as upon the whole. It should seem, I thought, as if when the master set his signature to that grave canvas, he had not only caught the image of one smiling and false-eyed woman, but stamped the essential quality of a race.

From that day forth, whether I came or went, I was sure to find the Señora seated in the sun against a pillar, or stretched on a rug before the fire; only at times she would shift her station to the top round of the stone staircase, where she lay with the same nonchalance right across my path. In all these days, I never knew her to display the least spark of energy beyond what she expended in brushing and re-brushing her copious copper-coloured hair, or in lisping out, in the rich and broken hoarseness of her voice, her customary idle salutations to myself. These, I think, were her two chief pleasures, beyond that of mere quiescence. She seemed always proud of her remarks, as though they had been witticisms: and, indeed, though they were empty enough, like the conversation of many respectable persons, and turned on a very narrow range of subjects, they were never meaningless or incoherent; nay, they had a certain beauty of their own, breathing as they did, of her entire contentment. Now she would speak of the warmth in which (like her son) she greatly delighted; now of the flowers of the pomegranate trees, and now of the white doves and long-winged swallows that fanned the air of the court. The birds excited her. As they raked the eaves in their swift flight, or skimmed sidelong past her with a rush of wind, she would sometimes stir, and sit a little up, and seem to awaken from her doze of satisfaction. But for the rest of her days she lay luxuriously folded on herself and sunk in sloth and pleasure. Her invincible content at first annoyed me, but I came gradually to find repose in the spectacle, until at last it grew to be my habit to sit down beside her four times in the day, both coming and going, and to talk with her sleepily, I scarce knew of what. I had come to like her dull, almost animal neighbourhood; her beauty and her stupidity soothed and amused me. I began to find a kind of transcendental good sense in her remarks, and her unfathomable good nature moved me to admiration and envy. The liking was returned; she enjoyed my presence half unconsciously, as a man in deep meditation may enjoy the babbling of a brook. I can scarce say she brightened when I came, for satisfaction was written on her face eternally, as on some foolish statue's; but I was made conscious of her pleasure by some more intimate communication than the sight. And one day, as I sat within reach of her on the marble step, she suddenly shot forth one of her hands and patted mine. The thing was done, and she was back in her accustomed attitude before my mind had received intelligence of the caress; and when I turned to look her in the face I could perceive no answerable sentiment. It was plain she attached no moment to the act, and I blamed myself for my own more uneasy consciousness.

## 9

THE sight and (if I may so call it) the acquaintance of the mother confirmed the view I had already taken of the son. The family blood had been impoverished, perhaps by long in-breeding, which I knew to be a common error among the proud and the exclusive. No decline, indeed, was to be traced in the body, which had been handed down unimpaired in shapeliness and strength; and the faces of to-day were struck as sharply from the mint as the face of two centuries ago that smiled upon me from the portrait. But the intelligence (that more precious heirloom) was degenerate; the treasure of ancestral memory ran low; and it had required the potent, plebeian crossing of a muleteer or mountain contrabandista to raise what approached bebetude in the mother into the active oddity of the son. Yet, of the two, it was the mother I preferred. Of Felipe, vengeful and placable, full of starts and shyings, inconstant as a hare, I could even conceive as a creature possibly obnoxious. Of the mother I had no thoughts but those of kindness. And, indeed, as spectators are apt ignorantly to

take sides, I grew something of a partisan in the enmity which I perceived to smoulder between them. True, it seemed mostly on the mother's part. She would sometimes draw in her breath as he came near, and the pupils of her vacant eyes would contract with horror or fear. Her emotions, such as they were, were much upon the surface and readily shared; and this latent repulsion occupied my mind, and kept me wondering on what grounds it rested, and whether the son was certainly in fault.

I had been about ten days in the residencia, when there sprang up a high and harsh wind, carrying clouds of dust. It came out of malarious lowlands, and over several snowy sierras. The nerves of those on whom it blew were strung and jangled; their eyes smarted with the dust; their legs ached under the burthen of their body; and the touch of one hand upon another grew to be odious. The wind, besides, came down the gullies of the hills and stormed about the house with a great, hollow buzzing and whistling that was wearisome to the ear and dismally depressing to the mind. It did not so much blow in gusts as with the steady sweep of a waterfall, so that there was no remission of discomfort while it blew. But higher upon the mountain, it was probably of a more variable strength, with accesses of fury; for there came down at times a far-off wailing, infinitely grievous to hear; and at times, on one of the high shelves or terraces, there would start up, and then disperse, a tower of dust, like the smoke of an explosion.

I no sooner awoke in bed than I was conscious of the nervous tension and depression of the weather, and the effect grew stronger as the day proceeded. It was in vain that I resisted; in vain that I set forth upon my customary morning's walk; the irrational, unchanging fury of the storm had soon beat down my strength and wrecked my temper; and I returned to the residencia, glowing with dry heat, and foul and gritty with dust. The court had a forlorn appearance; now and then a glimmer of sun fled over it; now and then the wind swooped down upon the pomegranates, and scattered the blossoms, and set the window shutters clapping on the wall. In the recess the Señora was pacing to and fro with a flushed countenance and bright eyes; I thought, too, she was speaking to herself, like one in anger. But when I addressed her with my customary salutation, she only replied by a sharp gesture and continued her walk. The weather had distempered even this impassive creature; and as I went on upstairs I was the less ashamed of my own discomposure.

All day the wind continued; and I sat in my room and made a feint of reading, or walked up and down, and listened to the riot overhead. Night fell, and I had not so much as a candle. I began to long for some society, and stole down to the court. It was now plunged in the blue of the first darkness; but the recess was redly lighted by the fire. The wood had been piled high, and was crowned by a shock of flames, which the draught of the chimney brandished to and fro. In this strong and shaken brightness the Señora continued pacing from wall to wall with disconnected gestures, clasping her hands, stretching forth her arms, throwing back her head as in appeal to heaven. In these disordered movements the beauty and grace of the woman showed more clearly; but there was a light in her eye that struck on me unpleasantly; and when I had looked on awhile in silence, and seemingly unobserved, I turned tail as I had come, and groped my way back again to my own chamber.

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BY the time Felipe brought my supper and lights, my nerve was utterly gone; and, had the lad been such as I was used to seeing him, I should have kept him (even by force had that been necessary) to take off the edge from my distasteful solitude. But on Felipe, also, the wind had exercised its influence. He had been feverish all day; now that the night had come he was fallen into a low and tremulous humour that reacted on my own. The sight of his scared face, his starts and pallors and sudden hearkenings, unstrung me; and when he dropped and broke a dish, I fairly leapt out of my seat.

"I think we are all mad to-day," said I, affecting to laugh.

"It is the black wind," he replied dolefully. "You feel as if you must do something, and you don't know what it is."

I noted the aptness of the description; but, indeed, Felipe had sometimes a strange felicity in rendering into words the sensations of the body. "And your mother, too," said I: "she seems to feel this weather

much. Do you not fear she may be unwell?"

He stared at me a little, and then said: "No," almost defiantly; and the next moment, carrying his hand to his brow, cried out lamentably on the wind and the noise that made his head go round like a mill-wheel. "Who can be well?" he cried; and, indeed, I could only echo his question, for I was disturbed enough myself.

I went to bed early, wearied with day-long restlessness: but the poisonous nature of the wind, and its ungodly and unintermittent uproar, would not suffer me to sleep. I lay there and tossed, my nerves and senses on the stretch. At times I would doze, dream horribly, and wake again; and these snatches of oblivion confused me as to time. But it must have been late on in the night, when I was suddenly startled by an outbreak of pitiable and hateful cries. I leaped from my bed, supposing I had dreamed; but the cries still continued to fill the house, cries of pain, I thought, but certainly of rage also, and so savage and discordant that they shocked the heart. It was no illusion; some living thing, some lunatic or some wild animal, was being foully tortured. The thought of Felipe and the squirrel flashed into my mind, and I ran to the door, but it had been locked from the outside; and I might shake it as I pleased, I was a fast prisoner. Still the cries continued. Now they would dwindle down into a moaning that seemed to be articulate, and at these times I made sure they must be human; and again they would break forth and fill the house with ravings worthy of hell. I stood at the door and gave ear to them, till at last they died away. Long after that, I still lingered and still continued to hear them mingle in fancy with the storming of the wind; and when at last I crept to my bed, it was with a deadly sickness and a blackness of horror on my heart.

It was little wonder if I slept no more. Why had I been locked in? What had passed? Who was the author of these indescribable and shocking cries? A human being? It was inconceivable. A beast? The cries were scarce quite bestial; and what animal, short of a lion or a tiger, could thus shake the solid walls of the residencia? And while I was thus turning over the elements of the mystery, it came into my mind that I had not yet set eyes upon the daughter of the house. What was more probable than that the daughter of the Señora, and the sister of Felipe, should be herself insane? Or, what more likely than that these ignorant and half-witted people should seek to manage an afflicted kinswoman by violence? Here was a solution; and yet when I called to mind the cries (which I never did without a shuddering chill) it seemed altogether insufficient: not even cruelty could wring such cries from madness. But of one thing I was sure: I could not live in a house where such a thing was half conceivable and not probe the matter home and, if necessary, interfere.

The next day came, the wind had blown itself out, and there was nothing to remind me of the business of the night. Felipe came to my bedside with obvious cheerfulness; as I passed through the court, the Señora was sunning herself with her accustomed immobility; and when I issued from the gateway, I found the whole face of nature austerely smiling, the heavens of a cold blue, and sown with great cloud islands, and the mountain-sides mapped forth into provinces of light and shadow. A short walk restored me to myself, and renewed within me the resolve to plumb this mystery; and when, from the vantage of my knoll, I had seen Felipe pass forth to his labours in the garden, I returned at once to the residencia to put my design in practice. The Señora appeared plunged in slumber; I stood awhile and marked her, but she did not stir; even if my design were indiscreet I had little to fear from such a guardian; and turning away, I mounted to the gallery and began my exploration of the house.

All morning I went from one door to another, and entered spacious and faded chambers, some rudely shuttered, some receiving their full charge of daylight, all empty and unhomely. It was a rich house, on which Time had breathed his tarnish and dust had scattered disillusion. The spider swung there; the bloated tarantula scampered on the cornices; ants had their crowded highways on the floor of halls of audience; the big and foul fly, that lives on carrion and is often the messenger of death, had set up his nest in the rotten woodwork, and buzzed heavily about the rooms. Here and there a stool or two, a couch, a bed, or a great carved chair remained behind, like islets on the bare floors, to testify of man's bygone habitation; and everywhere the walls were set with the portraits of the dead.

I could judge, by these decaying effigies, in the house of what a great and what a handsome race I was then wandering. Many of the men wore orders on their breasts, and had the port of noble officers; the women were all richly attired; the canvases most of them by famous hands. But it was not so much these evidences of greatness that took hold upon my mind, even contrasted, as they were, with the present depopulation and decay of that great house. It was rather the parable of family life that I read in this succession of fair faces and shapely bodies. Never before had I so realised the miracle of the continued race, the creation and recreation, the weaving and changing and handing down of fleshly elements. That a child should be born of its mother, that it should grow and clothe itself (we know not how) with humanity, and put on inherited looks, and turn its head with the manner of one ascendant, and offer its hand with the gesture of another, are wonders dulled for us by repetition. But in the singular unity of look, in the common features and common bearing, of all these painted generations on the walls of the residencia, the miracle started out and looked me in the face. And an ancient mirror falling opportunely in my way, I stood and read my own features a long while, tracing out on either hand the filaments of descent and the bonds that knit me with my family.

At last, in the course of these investigations, I opened the door of a chamber that bore the marks of habitation. It was of large proportions and faced to the north, where the mountains were most wildly figured. The embers of a fire smouldered and smoked upon the hearth, to which a chair had been drawn close. And yet the aspect of the chamber was ascetic to the degree of sternness; the chair was uncushioned; the floor and walls were naked; and beyond the books which lay here and there in some confusion, there was no instrument of either work or pleasure. The sight of books in the house of such a family exceedingly amazed me; and I began with a great hurry, and in momentary fear of interruption, to go from one to another and hastily inspect their character. They were of all sorts, devotional, historical, and scientific, but mostly of a great age and in the Latin tongue. Some I could see to bear the marks of constant study; others had been torn across and tossed aside as if in petulance or disapproval. Lastly, as I cruised about that empty chamber, I espied some papers written upon with pencil on a table near the window. An unthinking curiosity led me to take one up. It bore a copy of verses, very roughly metred in the original Spanish, and which I may render somewhat thus:

> Pleasure approached with pain and shame,
> Grief with a wreath of lilies came.
> Pleasure showed the lovely sun;
> Jesu dear, how sweet it shone!
> Grief with her worn hand pointed on,
> Jesu dear, to thee!

Shame and confusion at once fell on me; and, laying down the paper, I beat an immediate retreat from the apartment. Neither Felipe nor his mother could have read the books nor written these rough but feeling verses. It was plain I had stumbled with sacrilegious feet into the room of the daughter of the house. God knows, my own heart most sharply punished me for my indiscretion. The thought that I had thus secretly pushed my way into the confidence of a girl so strangely situated, and the fear that she might somehow come to hear of it, oppressed me like guilt. I blamed myself besides for my suspicions of the night before; wondered that I should ever have attributed those shocking cries to one of whom I now conceived as of a saint, spectral of mien, wasted with maceration, bound up in the practices of a mechanical devotion, and dwelling in a great isolation of soul with her incongruous relatives; and as I leaned on the balustrade of the gallery and looked down into the bright close of pomegranates and at the gaily dressed and somnolent woman, who just then stretched herself and delicately licked her lips as in the very sensuality of sloth, my mind swiftly compared the scene with the cold chamber looking northward on the mountains, where the daughter dwelt.

That same afternoon, as I sat upon my knoll, I saw the Padre enter the gate of the residencia. The revelation of the daughter's character had struck home to my fancy, and almost blotted out the horrors of the night before; but at sight of this worthy man the memory revived. I descended, then, from the knoll, and making a circuit among the woods, posted myself by the wayside to await his passage. As soon as he appeared I stepped forth and introduced myself as the lodger of the residencia. He had a very strong, honest countenance, on which

it was easy to read the mingled emotions with which he regarded me, as a foreigner, a heretic, and yet one who had been wounded for the good cause. Of the family at the residencia he spoke with reserve, and yet with respect. I mentioned that I had not yet seen the daughter, whereupon he remarked that that was as it should be, and looked at me a little askance. Lastly, I plucked up courage to refer to the cries that had disturbed me in the night. He heard me out in silence, and then stopped and partly turned about, as though to mark beyond doubt that he was dismissing me.

"Do you take tobacco powder?" said he, offering his snuffbox; and then, when I had refused, "I am an old man," he added, "and I may be allowed to remind you that you are a guest."

"I have, then, your authority," I returned, firmly enough, although I flushed at the implied reproof, "to let things take their course, and not to interfere?"

He said "yes," and with a somewhat uneasy salute turned and left me where I was. But he had done two things: he had set my conscience at rest, and he had awakened my delicacy. I made a great effort, once more dismissed the recollections of the night, and fell once more to brooding on my saintly poetess. At the same time, I could not quite forget that I had been locked in, and that night when Felipe brought me my supper I attacked him warily on both points of interest.

"I never see your sister," said I, casually.

"Oh no," said he; "she is a good, good girl," and his mind instantly veered to something else.

"Your sister is pious, I suppose," I asked in the next pause.

"Oh," he cried, joining his hands with extreme fervour, "a saint; it is she that keeps me up."

"You are very fortunate" said I "for the most of us I am afraid and myself among the number are better at going down."

"Señor," said Felipe earnestly, "I would not say that. You should not tempt your angel. If one goes down, where is he to stop?"

"Why, Felipe," said I, "I had no guess you were a preacher, and I may say a good one; but I suppose that is your sister's doing?"

He nodded at me with round eyes.

"Well then," I continued, "she has doubtless reproved you for your sin of cruelty?"

"Twelve times!" he cried; for this was the phrase by which the odd creature expressed the sense of frequency. "And I told her you had done so—I remember that," he added proudly—"and she was pleased."

"Then, Felipe," said I, "what were those cries that I heard last night? For surely they were cries of some creature in suffering."

"The wind," returned Felipe, looking in the fire.

I took his hand in mine, at which, thinking it to be a caress, he smiled with a brightness of pleasure that came near disarming my resolve. But I trod the weakness down. "The wind," I repeated; "and yet I think it was this hand," holding it up, "that had first locked me in." The lad shook visibly, but answered never a word. "Well," said I, "I am a stranger and a guest. It is not my part either to meddle or to judge in your affairs; in these you shall take your sister's counsel, which I cannot doubt to be excellent. But in so far as concerns my own I will be no man's prisoner, and I demand that key." Half an hour later my door was suddenly thrown open, and the key tossed ringing on the floor.

## ¶

A DAY or two after I came in from a walk a little before the point of noon. The Señora was lying lapped in slumber on the threshold of the recess; the pigeons dozed below the eaves like snowdrifts; the house was under a deep spell of noontide quiet; and only a wandering and gentle wind from the mountain stole round the galleries, rustled among the pomegranates, and pleasantly stirred the shadows. Something in the stillness moved me to imitation, and I went very lightly, across the court and up the marble staircase. My foot was on the topmost round, when a door opened, and I found myself face to face with Olalla. Surprise transfixed me, her loveliness struck to my heart; she glowed in the deep shadow of the gallery; a gem of colour; her eyes took hold upon mine and clung there, and bound us together like the joining of hands; and the moments we thus stood face to face, drinking each other in, were sacramental and the wedding

of souls. I know not how long it was before I awoke out of a deep trance, and, hastily bowing, passed on into the upper stair. She did not move, but followed me with her great, thirsting eyes; and as I passed out of sight it seemed to me as if she paled and faded.

In my own room, I opened the window and looked out, and could not think what change had come upon that austere field of mountains that it should thus sing and shine under the lofty heaven. I had seen her—Olalla! And the stone crags answered, Olalla! and the dumb, unfathomable azure answered, Olalla! The pale saint of my dreams had vanished for ever; and in her place I beheld this maiden on whom God had lavished the richest colours and the most exuberant energies of life, whom he had made active as a deer, slender as a reed, and in whose great eyes he had lighted the torches of the soul. The thrill of her young life, strung like a wild animal's, had entered into me; the force of soul that had looked out from her eyes and conquered mine, mantled about my heart and sprang to my lips in singing. She passed through my veins: she was one with me.

I will not say that this enthusiasm declined; rather my soul held out in its ecstacy as in a strong castle, and was there beseiged by cold and sorrowful considerations. I could not doubt but that I loved her at first sight, and already with a quivering ardour that was strange to my experience. What, then, was to follow? She was the child of an afflicted house, the Señora's daughter, the sister of Felipe; she bore it even in her beauty. She had the lightness and swiftness of the one, swift as an arrow, light as dew; like the other, she shone on the pale background of the world with the brilliancy of flowers. I could not call by the name of brother that half-witted lad, nor by the name of mother that immovable and lovely thing of flesh, whose silly eyes and perpetual simper now recurred to my mind like something hateful. And if I could not marry, what then? She was helplessly unprotected; her eyes, in that single and long glance which had been all our intercourse, had confessed a weakness equal to my own; but in my heart I knew her for the student of the cold northern chamber, and the writer of the sorrowful lines; and this was a knowledge to disarm a brute. To flee was more than I could find courage for; but I registered a vow of unsleeping circumspection.

As I turned from the window, my eyes alighted on the portrait. It had fallen dead, like a candle after sunrise; it followed me with eyes of paint. I knew it to be like, and marvelled at the tenacity of type in that declining race; but the likeness was swallowed up in difference. I remembered how it had seemed to me a thing unapproachable in the life, a creature rather of the painter's craft than of the modesty of nature, and I marvelled at the thought, and exulted in the image of Olalla. Beauty I had seen before, and not been charmed, and I had been often drawn to women, who were not beautiful except to me; but in Olalla all that I desired and had not dared to imagine was united.

I did not see her the next day, and my heart ached and my eyes longed for her, as men long for morning. But the day after, when I returned, about my usual hour, she was once more on the gallery, and our looks once more met and embraced. I would have spoken, I would have drawn near to her; but strongly as she plucked at my heart, drawing me like a magnet, something yet more imperious witheld me; and I could only bow and pass by; and she, leaving my salutation unanswered, only followed me with her noble eyes.

I had now her image by rote, and as I conned the traits in memory it seemed as if I read her very heart. She was dressed with something of her mother's coquetry, and love of positive colour. Her robe, which I knew she must have made with her own hands, clung about her with a cunning grace. After the fashion of that country, besides, her bodice stood open in the middle, in a long slit, and here, in spite of the poverty of the house, a gold coin, hanging by a ribbon, lay on her brown bosom. These were proofs, had any been needed, of her inborn delight in life and her own loveliness. On the other hand, in her eyes, that hung upon mine, I could read depth beyond depth of passion and sadness, lights of poetry and hope, blacknesses of despair, and thoughts that were above the earth. It was a lovely body, but the inmate, the soul, was more than worthy of that lodging. Should I leave this incomparable flower to wither unseen on these rough mountains? Should I despise the great gift offered me in the eloquent silence of her eyes? Here was a soul immured;

should I not burst its prison? All side considerations fell off from me; were she the child of Herod I swore I should make her mine; and that very evening I set myself, with a mingled sense of treachery and disgrace, to captivate the brother. Perhaps I read him with more favourable eyes, perhaps the thought of his sister always summoned up the better qualities of that imperfect soul; but he had never seemed to me so amiable, and his very likeness to Olalla, while it annoyed, yet softened me.

A third day passed in vain—an empty desert of hours. I would not lose a chance, and loitered all afternoon in the court where (to give myself a countenance) I spoke more than usual with the Señora. God knows it was with a most tender and sincere interest that I now studied her; and even as for Felipe, so now for the mother I was conscious of a growing warmth of toleration. And yet I wondered. Even while I spoke with her, she would doze off into a little sleep, and presently awake again without embarrassment; and this composure staggered me. And again, as I marked her make infinitesimal changes in her posture, savouring and lingering on the bodily pleasure of the moment, I was driven to wonder at this depth of passive sensuality. She lived in her body; and her consciousness was all sunk into and disseminated through her members, where it luxuriously dwelt. Lastly, I could not grow accustomed to her eyes. Each time she turned on me those great, beautiful, and meaningless orbs, wide open to the day, but closed against human inquiry—each time I had occasion to observe the lively changes of her pupils which expanded and contracted in a breath—I know not what it was came over me, I can find no name for the mingled feeling of disappointment, annoyance and distaste that jarred along my nerves. I tried her on a variety of subjects, equally in vain; and at last led the talk to her daughter. But even there she proved indifferent; said she was pretty, which (as with children) was her highest word of commendation, but was plainly incapable of any higher thought; and when I remarked that Olalla seemed silent, merely yawned in my face and replied that speech was of no great use when you had nothing to say. "People speak much, very much," she added, looking at me with expanded pupils; and then again yawned, and again showed me a mouth that was as dainty as a toy. This time I took the hint, and, leaving her to her repose, went up into my own chamber to sit by the open window, looking on the hills and not beholding them, sunk in lustrous and deep dreams, and hearkening in fancy to the note of a voice that I had never heard.

I awoke on the fifth morning with a brightness of anticipation that seemed to challenge Fate. I was sure of myself, light of heart and foot, and resolved to put my love incontinently to the touch of knowledge. It should lie no longer under the bonds of silence, a dumb thing, living by the eye only, like the love of beasts; but should now put on the spirit, and enter upon the joys of the complete human intimacy. I thought of it with wild hopes, like a voyager to El Dorado; into that unknown and lovely country of her soul, I no longer trembled to adventure. Yet when I did indeed encounter her, the same force of passion descended on me and at once submerged my mind; speech seemed to drop away from me like a childish habit; and I but drew near to her as the giddy man draws near to the margin of a gulf. She drew back from me a little as I came; but her eyes did not waver from mine, and these lured me forward. At last, when I was already within reach of her, I stopped. Words were denied me; if I advanced I could but clasp her to my heart in silence; and all that was sane in me, all that was still unconquered, revolted against the thought of such an accost. So we stood for a second, all our life in our eyes, exchanging salvos of attraction and yet each resisting; and then, with a great effort of the will, and conscious at the same time of a sudden bitterness of disappointment, I turned and went away in the same silence.

¶

WHAT power lay upon me that I could not speak? And she, why was she also silent? Why did she draw away before me dumbly, with fascinated eyes? Was this love? or was it a mere brute attraction, mindless and inevitable, like that of the magnet for the steel? We had never spoken, we were wholly strangers; and yet an influence, strong as the grasp of a giant, swept us silently together. On my side, it filled me with impatience; and yet I was sure that she was worthy; I had seen her

books, read her verses, and thus, in a sense, divined the soul of my mistress. But on her side, it struck me almost cold. Of me, she knew nothing but my bodily favour; she was drawn to me as stones fall to earth; the laws that rule the earth conducted her, unconsenting, to my arms; and I drew back at the thought of such a bridal, and began to be jealous for myself. It was not thus that I desired to be loved. And then I began to fall into a great pity for the girl herself. I thought how sharp must be her mortification, that she, the student, the recluse, Felipe's saintly monitress, should have thus confessed an overweening weakness for a man with whom she had never exchanged a word. And at the coming of pity, all other thoughts were swallowed up; and I longed only to find and console and reassure her; to tell her how wholly her love was returned on my side, and how her choice, even if blindly made, was not unworthy.

The next day it was glorious weather; depth upon depth of blue over-canopied the mountains; the sun shone wide; and the wind in the trees and the many falling torrents in the mountains filled the air with delicate and haunting music. Yet I was prostrated with sadness. My heart wept for the sight of Olalla, as a child weeps for its mother. I sat down on a boulder on the verge of the low cliffs that bound the plateau to the north. Thence I looked down into the wooded valley of a stream, where no foot came. In the mood I was in, it was even touching to behold the place untenanted; it lacked Olalla; and I thought of the delight and glory of a life passed wholly with her in that strong air, and among those rugged and lovely surroundings at first with a whimpering sentiment, and then again with such a fiery joy that I seemed to grow in strength and stature, like a Samson.

And then suddenly I was aware of Olalla drawing near. She appeared out of a grove of cork trees, and came straight towards me; and I stood up and waited. She seemed in her walking a creature of such life and fire and lightness as amazed me; yet she came quietly and slowly. Her energy was in the slowness; but for inimitable strength, I felt she would have run, she would have flown to me. Still, as she approached, she kept her eyes lowered to the ground; and when she had drawn quite near, it was without one glance that she addressed me. At the first note of her voice I started. It was for this I had been waiting; this was the last test of my love. And lo, her enunciation was precise and clear, not lisping and incomplete like that of her family; and the voice, though deeper than usual with women, was still both youthful and womanly. She spoke in a rich chord; golden contralto strains mingled with hoarseness, as the red threads were mingled with the brown ones among her tresses. It was not only a voice that spoke to my heart directly; but it spoke to me of her. And yet her words immediately plunged me back upon despair.

"You will go away," she said, "to-day."

¶

HER example broke the bonds of my speech; I felt as lightened of a weight, or as if a spell had been dissolved. I know not in what words I answered; but, standing before her on the cliffs, I poured out the whole ardour of my love, telling her that I lived upon the thought of her, slept only to dream of her loveliness, and would gladly forswear my country, my language, and my friends, to live for ever by her side. And then, strongly commanding myself, I changed the note; I reassured, I comforted her; I told her I had divined in her a pious and heroic spirit, with which I was worthy to sympathise, and which I longed to share and lighten. "Nature," I told her, "was the voice of God, which men disobey at peril; and if we were thus humbly drawn together, ay, even as by a miracle of love, it must imply a divine fitness in our souls; we must be made," I said—"made for one another. We should be mad rebels," I cried out—"mad rebels against God, not to obey this instinct."

She shook her head. "You will go to-day," she repeated, and then with a gesture, and in a sudden, sharp note—"no, not to-day," she cried, "to-morrow."

But at this sign of relenting, power came in upon me in a tide. I stretched out my arms and called upon her name; and she leaped to me and clung to me. The hills rocked about us, the earth quailed; a shock as of a blow went through me and left me blind and dizzy. And the next moment, she had thrust me back, broken rudely from my arms, and fled with the speed of a deer among the cork trees.

I stood and shouted to the mountains; I turned and went back towards the residencia, walking upon air. She sent me away, and yet I had but to call upon her name and she came to me. These were but the weaknesses of girls, from which even she, the strangest of her sex, was not exempted. Go? Not I, Olalla—O, not I, Olalla, my Olalla! A bird sang nearby; and in that season, birds were rare. It bade me be of good cheer. And once more the whole countenance of nature, from the ponderous and stable mountains down to the lightest leaf and the smallest darting fly in the shadow of the groves, began to stir before me and to put on the lineaments of life and wear a face of awful joy. The sunshine struck upon the hills, strong as a hammer on the anvil, and the hills shook; the earth, under that vigorous isolation, yielded up heady scents; the woods smouldered in the blaze. I felt a thrill of travail and delight run through the earth. Something elemental, something rude, violent, and savage, in the love that sang in my heart, was like a key to nature's secrets; and the very stones that rattled under my feet appeared alive and friendly. Olalla! Her touch had quickened, and renewed, and strung me up to the old pitch of concert with the rugged earth, to a swelling of the soul that men learn to forget in their polite assemblies. Love burned in me like rage; tenderness waxed fierce; I hated, I adored, I pitied, I revered her with ecstasy. She seemed the link that bound me in with dead things on the one hand, and with our pure and pitying God upon the other; a thing brutal and divine, and akin at once to the innocence and to the unbridled forces of the earth.

My head thus reeling, I came into the courtyard of the residencia, and the sight of the mother struck me like a revelation. She sat there, all sloth and contentment, blinking under the strong sunshine, branded with a passive enjoyment, a creature set quite apart, before whom my ardour fell away like a thing ashamed. I stopped a moment, and, commanding such shaken tones as I was able, said a word or two. She looked at me with her unfathomable kindness; her voice in reply sounded vaguely out of the realm of peace in which she slumbered, and there fell on my mind, for the first time, a sense of respect for one so uniformly innocent and happy, and I passed on in a kind of wonder at myself, that I should be so much disquieted.

On my table there lay a piece of the same yellow paper I had seen in the north room; it was written on with pencil in the same hand, Olalla's hand, and I picked it up with a sudden sinking of alarm, and read: "If you have any kindness for Olalla, if you have any chivalry for a creature sorely wrought, go from here to-day; in pity, in honour, for the sake of Him who died, I supplicate that you shall go." I looked at this awhile in mere stupidity, then I began to awaken to a weariness and horror of life; the sunshine darkened outside on the bare hills, and I began to shake like a man in terror. The vacancy thus suddenly opened in my life unmanned me like a physical void. It was not my heart, it was not my happiness, it was life itself that was involved. I could not lose her. I said so, and stood repeating it. And then, like one in a dream, I moved to the window, put forth my hand to open the casement, and thrust it through the pane. The blood spurted from my wrist; and with an instantaneous quietude and command of myself, I pressed my thumb on the little leaping fountain, and reflected what to do. In that empty room there was nothing to my purpose; I felt, besides, that I required assistance. There shot into my mind a hope that Olalla herself might be my helper, and I turned and went downstairs, still keeping my thumb upon the wound.

There was no sign of either Olalla or Felipe, and I addressed myself to the recess, whither the Señora had now drawn quite back and sat dozing close before the fire, for no degree of heat appeared too much for her.

"Pardon me," said I, "if I disturb you, but I must apply to you for help."

She looked up sleepily and asked me what it was, and with the very words, I thought she drew in her breath with a widening of the nostrils and seemed to come suddenly and fully alive.

"I have cut myself," I said, "and rather badly. See!" And I held out my two hands from which the blood was oozing and dripping.

Her great eyes opened wide, the pupils shrank into points; a veil seemed to fall from her face, and leave it sharply expressive and yet inscrutable. And as I still stood, marvelling a little at her disturbance, she came swiftly up to me, and stooped and

caught me by the hand; and the next moment my hand was at her mouth, and she had bitten me to the bone. The pang of the bite, the sudden spurting of blood, and the monstrous horror of the act, flashed through me all in one, and I beat her back; and she sprang at me again and again, with bestial cries, cries that I recognised, such cries as had awakened me on the night of the high wind. Her strength was like that of madness; mine was rapidly ebbing with the loss of blood; my mind besides was whirling with the abhorrent strangeness of the onslaught, and I was already forced against the wall, when Olalla ran betwixt us, and Felipe, following at a bound, pinned down his mother on the floor.

A trance-like weakness fell upon me; I saw, heard, and felt, but I was incapable of movement. I heard the struggle roll to and fro upon the floor, the yells of that catamount ringing up to Heaven as she strove to reach me. I felt Olalla clasp me in her arms, her hair falling on my face, and, with the strength of a man, raise and half-drag, half-carry me upstairs into my own room, where she cast me down upon the bed. Then I saw her hasten to the door and lock it, and stand an instant listening to the savage cries that shook the residencia. And then, swift and light as a thought, she was again beside me, binding up my hand, laying it in her bosom, moaning and mourning over it with dove-like sounds. They were not words that came to her, they were sounds more beautiful than speech, infinitely touching, infinitely tender; and yet as I lay there, a thought stung to my heart, a thought wounded me like a sword, a thought, like a worm in a flower, profaned the holiness of my love. Yes, they were beautiful sounds, and they were inspired by human tenderness; but was their beauty human?

¶

ALL day I lay there. For a long time the cries of that nameless female thing, as she struggled with her half-witted whelp, resounded through the house, and pierced me with despairing sorrow and disgust. They were the death-cry of my love; my love was murdered; it was not only dead, but an offence to me; and yet, think as I pleased, feel as I must, it still swelled within me like a storm of sweetness, and my heart melted at her looks and touch. This horror that had sprung out, this doubt upon Olalla, this savage and bestial strain that ran not only through the whole behaviour of her family, but found a place in the very foundations and story of our love—though it appalled, though it shocked and sickened me, was yet not of power to break the knot of my infatuation.

When the cries had ceased, there came the scraping at the door, by which I knew Felipe was without; and Olalla went and spoke to him—I know not what. With that exception, she stayed close beside me, now kneeling by my bed and fervently praying, now sitting with her eyes upon mine. So then, for these six hours I drank in her beauty, and silently perused the story in her face. I saw the golden coin hover on her breaths; I saw her eyes darken and brighten, and still speak no language but that of an unfathomable kindness; I saw the faultless face, and through the robe, the line of the faultless body. Night came at last, and in the growing darkness of the chamber, the sight of her slowly melted; but even then the touch of her smooth hand lingered in mine and talked with me. To lie thus in deadly weakness and drink in the traits of the beloved, is to reawake to love from whatever shock of disillusion. I reasoned with myself; and I shut my eyes on horrors, and again I was very bold to accept the worst. What mattered it if that imperious sentiment survived; if her eyes still beckoned and attached me; if now, even as before, every fibre of my dull body yearned and turned to her? Late on in the night some strength revived in me, and I spoke.

"Olalla," I said, "nothing matters; I ask nothing; I am content; I love you."

She knelt down awhile and prayed, and I devoutly respected her devotions. The moon had begun to shine in upon one side of each of the three windows, and make a misty clearness in the room, by which I saw her indistinctly. When she re-arose she made the sign of the cross.

"It is for me to speak," she said, "and for you to listen. I know; you can but guess. I prayed, how I prayed for you to leave this place. I begged it of you, and I know you would have granted me even this; or if not, O let me think so!"

"I love you!" I said.

"And yet you have lived in the world," she said, after a pause, "you are a man and wise; and I am but a child. Forgive me.

if I seem to teach, who am as ignorant as the trees of the mountain; but those who learn much do but skim the face of knowledge; they seize the laws, they conceive the dignity of the design—the horror of the living fact fades from their memory. It is we who sit at home with the evil who remember, I think, and are warned and pity. Go, rather, go now and keep me in mind. So I shall have a life in the cherished places of your memory: a life as much my own as that which I lead in this body."

"I love you," I said once more; and reaching out my weak hand, took hers, and carried it to my lips and kissed it. Nor did she resist, but winced a little; and I could see her look upon me with a frown that was not unkindly, only sad and baffled. And then it seemed she made a call upon her resolution; plucked my hand towards her, herself at the same time leaning somewhat forward and laid it on the beating of her heart. "There!" she cried, "you feel the very footfall of my life. It only moves for you; it is yours. But is it even mine? It is mine indeed to offer you, as I might take the coin from my neck, as I might break a live branch from a tree, and give it you. And yet not mine! I dwell, or I think I dwell (if I exist at all), somewhere apart, an impotent prisoner, and carried about and deafened by a mob that I disown. This capsule, such as throbs against the sides of animals, knows you at a touch for its master; ay, it loves you! But my soul, does my soul? I think not; I know not, fearing to ask. Yet when you spoke to me your words were of the soul; it is of the soul that you ask—it is only from the soul that you would take me."

"Olalla," I said, "the soul and the body are one, and mostly so in love. What the body chooses, the soul loves; where the body clings, the soul cleaves; body for body, soul to soul they come together at God's signal; and the lower part (if we can call aught low) is only the footstool and foundation of the highest."

"Have you," she said, "seen the portraits in the house of my fathers? Have you looked at my mother or at Felipe? Have your eyes ever rested on that picture that hangs by your bed? She who sat for it died ages ago; and she did evil in her life. But look again: there is my hand to the least line, there are my eyes and my hair. What is mine, then, and what am I? If not a curve in this poor body of mine (which you love, and for the sake of which you dotingly dream that you love me), not a gesture that I can frame, not a tone of my voice, not any look from my eyes, no, not even now when I speak to him I love, but has belonged to others? Others, ages dead, have wooed other men with my eyes; other men have heard the pleading of the same voice that now sounds in your ears. The hands of the dead are in my bosom; they move me, they pluck me, they guide me; I am a puppet at their command; and I but reinform features and attributes that have long been laid aside from evil in the quiet of the grave. Is it me you love, friend? or the race that made me? The girl who does not know and cannot answer for the least portion of herself? or the stream of which she is a transitory eddy, the tree of which she is the passing fruit? The race exists; it is old, it is ever young, it carries its eternal destiny in its bosom; upon it, like waves upon the sea, individual succeeds to individual, mocked with a semblance of self-control, but they are nothing. We speak of the soul, but the soul is in the race."

"You fret against the common law," I said. "You rebel against the voice of God, which he has made so winning to convince, so imperious to command. Hear it, and how it speaks between us! Your hand clings to mine, your heart leaps at my touch, the unknown elements of which we are compounded awake and run together at a look; the clay of the earth remembers its independent life and yearns to join us; we are drawn together as the stars are turned about in space, or as the tides ebb and flow, by things older and greater than we ourselves."

"Alas!" she said, "what can I say to you? My fathers, eight hundred years ago, ruled all this province: they were wise, great, cunning, and cruel; they were a picked race of the Spanish; their flags led in war; the king called them his cousin; the people, when the rope was slung for them or when they returned and found their hovels smoking, blasphemed their name. Presently a change began. Man has risen; if he has sprung from the brutes, he can descend again to the same level. The breath of weariness blew on their humanity and the cords relaxed; they began to go down; their minds fell on sleep, their passions awoke in gusts, heady and senseless like the wind in the gutters of the mountains; beauty was still handed down, but no longer

the guiding wit nor the human heart; the seed passed on, it was wrapped in flesh, the flesh covered the bones, but they were the bones and the flesh of brutes, and their mind was as the mind of flies. I speak to you as I dare; but you have seen for yourself how the wheel has gone backward with my doomed race. I stand, as it were, upon a little rising ground in this desperate descent, and see both before and behind, both what we have lost and to what we are condemned to go farther downward. And shall I—I that dwell apart in the house of the dead, my body, loathing its ways—shall I repeat the spell? Shall I bind another spirit, reluctant as my own, into this bewitched and tempest-broken tenement that I now suffer in? Shall I hand down this cursed vessel of humanity, charge it with fresh life as with fresh poison, and dash it, like a fire, in the faces of posterity? But my vow has been given; the race shall cease from off the earth. At this hour my brother is making ready; his foot will soon be on the stair; and you will go with him and pass out of my sight for ever. Think of me sometimes as one to whom the lesson of life was very harshly told, but who heard it with courage; as one who loved you indeed, but who hated herself so deeply that her love was hateful to her; as one who sent you away and yet would have longed to keep you for ever; who had no dearer hope than to forget you, and no greater fear than to be forgotten."

She had drawn towards the door as she spoke, her rich voice sounding softer and farther away; and with the last word, she was gone, and I lay alone in the moonlit chamber. What I might have done had not I lain bound by my extreme weakness, I know not; but as it was there fell upon me a great and blank despair. It was not long before there shone in at the door the ruddy glimmer of a lantern, and Felipe coming, charged me without a word upon his shoulders, and carried me down to the great gate, where the cart was waiting. In the moonlight the hills stood out sharply, as if they were of cardboard; on the glimmering surface of the plateau, and from among the low trees which swung together and sparkled in the wind, the great black cube of the residencia stood out bulkily, its mass only broken by three dimly-lighted windows in the northern front above the gate. They were Olalla's windows, and as the car jolted onwards I kept my eyes fixed upon them till, where the road dipped into a valley, they were lost to my view for ever. Felipe walked in silence beside the shafts, but from time to time he would check the mule and seem to look back upon me; and at length drew quite near and laid his hand upon my head. There was such kindness in the touch and such a simplicity, as of the brutes, that tears broke from me like the bursting of an artery.

"Felipe," I said, "take me where they will ask no questions."

He said never a word, but he turned his mule about, end for end, retraced some part of the way we had gone, and, striking into another path, led me to the mountain village, which was, as we say in Scotland, the kirkton of that thinly-peopled district. Some broken memories dwell in my mind of the day breaking over the plain, of the cart stopping, of arms that helped me down, of a bare room into which I was carried and of a swoon that fell upon me like sleep.

## ¶

THE next day and the days following, the old priest was often at my side with his snuffbox and prayer book, and after awhile, when I began to pick up strength, he told me that I was now on a fair way to recovery, and must as soon as possible hurry my departure; whereupon, without naming any reason, he took snuff and looked at me sideways. I did not affect ignorance. I knew he must have seen Olalla. "Sir," said I, "you know that I do not ask in wantonness. What of that family?"

He said they were very unfortunate; that it seemed a declining race, and that they were very poor and had been much neglected.

"But she has not," I said. "Thanks, doubtless, to yourself, she is instructed and wise beyond the use of women."

"Yes," he said, "the Señorita is well informed. But the family has been neglected."

"The mother?" I queried.

"Yes, the mother, too," said the Padre, taking snuff. "But Felipe is a well-intentioned lad."

"The mother is odd?" I asked.

"Very odd," replied the priest.

"I think, sir, we beat about the bush," said I. "You must know more of my affairs than you allow. You must know my

curiosity to be justified on many grounds. Will you not be frank with me?"

"My son," said the old gentleman, "I will be very frank with you on matters within my competence; on those of which I know nothing it does not require much discretion to be silent. I will not fence with you, I take your meaning perfectly; and what can I say, but that we are all in God's hands, and that His ways are not as our ways? I have even advised with my superiors in the church, but they, too, were dumb. It is a great mystery."

"Is she mad?" I asked.

"I will answer you according to my belief. She is not," returned the Padre, "or she was not. When she was young—God help me, I fear I neglected that wild lamb—she was surely sane; and yet, although it did not run to such heights, the same strain was already notable; it had been so before her in her father, ay, and before him, and this inclined me, perhaps, to think too lightly of it. But these things go on growing, not only in the individual but in the race."

"When she was young," I began, and my voice failed me for a moment, and it was only with a great effort that I was able to add, "was she like Olalla?"

"Now God forbid!" exclaimed the Padre. "God forbid that any man should think so slightingly of my favourite penitent! No, no; the Señorita (but for her beauty, which I wish most honestly she had less of) has not a hair's resemblance to what her mother was at the same age. I could not bear to have you think so; though heaven knows, it were, perhaps better that you should."

At this, I raised myself in bed, and opened my heart to the old man; telling him of our love and of her decision, owning my own horrors, my own passing fancies; but telling him that these were at an end; and with something more than a purely formal submission, appealing to his judgment.

He heard me very patiently and without surprise; and when I had done, he sat for some time silent. Then he began: "The church," and instantly broke off again to apologise. "I had forgotten, my child, that you were not a Christian," said he. "And, indeed, upon a point so highly unusual, even the church can scarce be said to have decided. But would you have my opinion? The Señorita is, in a matter of this kind, the best judge; I would accept her judgment."

On the back of that he went away, nor was he thenceforward so assiduous in his visits; indeed, even when I began to get about again, he plainly feared and deprecated my society, not as in distaste but much as a man might be disposed to flee from the riddling sphinx. The villagers, too, avoided me; they were unwilling to be my guides upon the mountain. I thought they looked at me askance, and I made sure that the more superstitious crossed themselves on my approach. At first I set this down to my heretical opinions; but it began at length to dawn upon me that if I was thus redoubted it was because I had stayed at the residencia. All men despise the savage notions of such peasantry; and yet I was conscious of a chill shadow that seemed to fall and dwell upon my love. It did not conquer, but I may not deny that it restrained my ardour.

Some miles westward of the village there was a gap in the sierra, from which the eye plunged direct upon the residencia; and thither it became my daily habit to repair. A wood crowned the summit; and just where the pathway issued from its fringes, it was overhung by a considerable shelf of rock, and that, in its turn, was surmounted by a crucifix of the size of life and more than usually painful in design. This was my perch; thence, day after day, I looked down upon the plateau, and the great old house, and could see Felipe, no bigger than a fly, going to and fro about the garden. Sometimes mists would draw across the view, and be broken up again by mountain winds; sometimes the plain slumbered below me in unbroken sunshine; it would sometimes be all blotted out by rain. This distant post, these interrupted sights of the place where my life had been so strangely changed suited the indecision of my humour. I passed whole days there, debating with myself the various elements of our position; now leaning to the suggestions of love, now giving an ear to prudence, and in the end halting irresolute between the two.

One day, as I was sitting on my rock, there came by that way a somewhat gaunt peasant wrapped in a mantle. He was a stranger, and plainly did not know me even by repute; for, instead of keeping the other side, he drew near and sat down beside me, and we had soon fallen in talk. Among other

things he told me he had been a muleteer, and in former years had much frequented these mountains; later on, he had followed the army with his mules, had realised a competence, and was now living retired with his family.

"Do you know that house?" I inquired at last, pointing to the residencia, for I readily wearied of any talk that kept me from the thought of Olalla.

He looked at me darkly and crossed himself.

"Too well," he said, "it was there that one of my comrades sold himself to Satan; the Virgin shield us from temptations! He has paid the price; he is now burning in the reddest place in Hell!"

A fear came upon me; I could answer nothing; and presently the man resumed, as if to himself. "Yes," he said, "O, yes, I know it. I have passed its doors. There was snow upon the pass, the wind was driving it; sure enough there was death that night upon the mountains, but there was worse beside the hearth. I took him by the arm, Señor, and dragged him to the gate; I conjured him, by all he loved and respected, to go forth with me; I went on my knees before him in the snow; and I could see he was moved by my entreaty. And just then she came out on the gallery, and called him by his name; and he turned, and there was she standing with a lamp in her hand and smiling on him to come back. I cried out aloud to God, and threw my arms about him, but he put me by, and left me alone. He had made his choice; God help us. I would pray for him, but to what end? there are sins that not even the Pope can loose."

"And your friend," I asked, "what became of him?"

"Nay, God knows," said the muleteer. "If all be true that we hear, his end was like his sin, a thing to raise the hair."

"Do you mean that he was killed?" I asked.

"Sure enough he was killed," returned the man. "But how? Ay, how? But these are things that it is sin to speak of."

"The people of that house . . ." I began.

But he interrupted me with a savage outburst. "The people?" he cried. "What people? There are neither men nor women in that house of Satan's! What? Have you lived here so long, and never heard?" And here he put his mouth to my ear and whispered, as if even the fowls of the mountain might have overheard and been stricken with horror.

What he told me was not true, nor was it even original; being, indeed, but a new edition, vamped up again by village ignorance and superstition, of stories nearly as ancient as the race of man. It was rather the application that appalled me. In the old days, he said, the church would have burned out that nest of basilisks; but the arm of the church was now shortened; his friend Miguel had been unpunished by the hands of men, and left to the more awful judgment of an offended God. This was wrong; but it should be so no more. The Padre was sunk in age; he was even bewitched himself; but the eyes of his flock were now awake to their own danger; and some day—ay, and before long—the smoke of that house should go up to heaven.

He left me filled with horror and fear. Which way to turn I knew not; whether first to warn the Padre, or to carry my ill-news direct to the threatened inhabitants of the residencia. Fate was to decide for me; for, while I was still hesitating I beheld the veiled figure of a woman drawing near to me up the pathway. No veil could deceive my penetration; by every line and every movement I recognised Olalla; and keeping hidden behind a corner of the rock, I suffered her to gain the summit. Then I came forward. She knew me and paused, but did not speak; I, too, remained silent; and we continued for some time to gaze upon each other with a passionate sadness.

"I thought you had gone," she said at length. "It is all that you can do for me—to go. It is all I ever asked of you. And you still stay. But do you know, that every day heaps up the peril of death, not only on your head, but on ours? A report has gone about the mountain; it is thought you love me, and the people will not suffer it."

I saw she was already informed of her danger, and I rejoiced at it. "Olalla," I said, "I am ready to go this day, this very hour, but not alone."

## ¶

SHE stepped aside and knelt down before the crucifix to pray, and I stood by and looked now at her and now at the object of her adoration, now at the living figure of the penitent, and now at the ghastly,

daubed countenance, the painted wounds, and the projected ribs of the image. The silence was only broken by the wailing of some large birds that circled sidelong, as if in surprise or alarm, about the summit of the hills. Presently Olalla rose again, turned towards me, raised her veil, and, still leaning with one hand on the shaft of the crucifix, looked upon me with a pale and sorrowful countenance.

"I have laid my hand upon the cross," she said. "The Padre says you are no Christian; but look up for a moment with my eyes, and behold the face of the Man of Sorrows. We are all such as He was—the inheritors of sin; we must all bear and expiate a past which was not ours; there is in all of us—ay, even in me—a sparkle of the divine. Like Him, we must endure for a little while, until morning returns bringing peace. Suffer me to pass on upon my way alone; it is thus that I shall be least lonely, counting for my friend Him who is the friend of all the distressed; it is thus that I shall be the most happy, having taken my farewell of earthly happiness, and willingly accepted sorrow for my portion."

I looked at the face of the crucifix, and, though I was no friend to images, and despised that imitative and grimacing art of which it was a rude example, some sense of what the thing implied was carried home to my intelligence. The face looked down upon me with a painful and deadly contraction; but the rays of a glory encircled it, and reminded me that the sacrifice was voluntary. It stood there, crowning the rock, as it still stands on so many highway-sides, vainly preaching to passers-by, an emblem of sad and noble truths; that pleasure is not an end, but an accident; that pain is the choice of the magnanimous; that it is best to suffer all things and do well. I turned and went down the mountain in silence; and when I looked back for the last time before the wood closed about my path, I saw Olalla still leaning on the crucifix.

¶ THE NOVEMBER number of *CASSELL'S MAGAZINE* is now on sale and contains the latest work of many popular authors, including EDGAR WALLACE and H. DE VERE STACPOOLE.

¶ A FEATURE of this issue of *CASSELL'S* is a long complete novel by JOHNSTON MCCULLEY. It deals with the exploits of "The Crimson Clown" (a new and arresting character in fiction) and is entitled, "The Crimson Clown's Chivalry."

¶ THE following are also among the contributors this month: ALBERT KINROSS, FRANK H. SHAW, ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN, TOM NEWMAN (the Billiards Champion), W. KOBOLD KNIGHT, etc. The price of *CASSELL'S MAGAZINE* is 1/-.

# The Mystery of The Managing Director

*Of a city magnate's overwhelming honour*

By DENIS MACKAIL

LONDON (said Gibson) has changed so much and so fast during the last fifteen or twenty years, the housebreaker and the building contractor have wrought their work so well, that photographic records of many familiar streets taken at the beginning of this period now seem to us like the pictures of some foreign town. Yet the change has been so continuous, the spectacle of gigantic cranes and of the steel skeletons of new buildings has become so constant a feature of the Londoner's horizon, that it is only when some sudden thought causes him to peer into his memory that the extent of this metamorphosis is brought home to him. The St. James's Hall, Walsingham House, Hengler's Circus, Newgate Prison, the Aquarium, the Big Wheel, Howell and James, where are they now? *Ou*, as has been well asked, *sont les neiges d'antan?*

It is more than likely, therefore, that unless you have some special reason to remember it, you have already forgotten even so recent and so hideous an edifice as Dix's Omniferous Stores, which ceased to exist as a separate entity in the retail microcosm barely twelve years ago.

It was in Knightsbridge that Mr. Abraham Dix, the founder of this business, entered, as a draper's errand-boy, on his commercial career. And it was in Knightsbridge that he gradually, during the sixty-five years of his life, turned his dreams into bricks and mortar, into plate-glass windows and mahogany counters , into Manchester goods and Paris models, into groceries, drugs, carpets, books, footwear, hardware, and sundries—in short, into the kind of establishment which could fully justify his slogan, "From Layette to Lay-Out." And finally it was in Knightsbridge again that, in his private office on the fourth floor of the Omniferous Stores, he was found dead in the peculiar circumstances which I shall now relate.

The month was December, and the Christmas Bazaar in the sub-basement was already swarming with customers, while in every department throughout the big building money was pouring into the cashiers' boxes. Mr. Dix had arrived as usual at half-past nine in the morning, had dictated his letters and instructions to his secretary and had, again as usual, dismissed her while he went through the schedule of returns for the previous day's trading. In the ordinary course of events he would not emerge again until shortly after noon, when it was his habit to make a general tour, incognito so far as the customers were concerned, of the whole establishment, winding up in the restaurant on the fifth floor, where he would examine and pass the menu and the musical director's programme for the selections to be played during lunch.

But at twenty-five minutes past eleven on this particular day, Mr. Emms, the head of the silk department, observed a lady of rather ample figure enter his domain with what he at first sight took to be a large red handkerchief protruding from one end of her muff.

He was on the point of stepping forward to warn her of the risk which she was incurring of losing her property, when to his surprise he realized that the handkerchief was, in fact, no handkerchief, but the head of a fully-developed and recently-deceased turkey. With a whispered word to his second-in-command he fell in behind her and followed her at a distance of some yards through into the silver department. Here the lady seemed suddenly to become aware of the unusual appearance of her muff and, with a quick glance round, she stuffed the head back into its interior. And then, satisfied apparently that she had not been seen, she laid a careless hand on the nearest counter, swept a large cigar-case off the edge, and caught it neatly in her unfolded umbrella.

In Mr. Emms's opinion the time had come for action. He stepped forward and touched the lady on the arm.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, "but may I trouble you to come with me to the Managing Director's office?"

The lady stared at him in surprise.

"Certainly not," she said. "What is the meaning of this impertinence?"

"I have no wish," answered Mr. Emms, "to cause any unnecessary unpleasantness, but I must ask you to do as I say."

The lady's assurance seemed suddenly to leave her.

"I am a clergyman's wife," she said. "If my husband were to hear of this, he would never lift up his head again. Let me pay for what I have taken, and I will pray for you every night as long as I live."

"That is impossible, madam," said Mr. Emms sternly. "You have no right to make such a suggestion."

The lady's eyes filled with tears.

"But you have such a kind face," she said pathetically. "Surely you cannot wish me to suffer such terrible disgrace. See here," she added, fumbling in the front of her dress; "here is a gold watch which I have just bought for my husband. Take it. It is yours, if only you will let me pay and go."

But Mr. Emms's horrified eyes had already detected the price label on the back of the proffered watch.

"Silence," he said. "You will come with me at once to Mr. Dix's office. I am not to be bribed with stolen goods."

The lady hung her head, and allowed herself to be led to the nearest lift. In a couple of minutes they had reached the private secretary's room.

"Please tell Mr. Dix," said Emms, "that I have observed this lady in the act of purloining the firm's property. And," he added ferociously, "you had better send down for a policeman."

"Certainly, Mr. Emms," said the secretary, and lifting the receiver of the telephone, she gave the necessary order. Then she moved to the door of Mr. Dix's room. The clergyman's wife sank into a chair, moaning, and wiping her eyes with three and a half yards of Honiton lace which she took from the pocket of her sealskin jacket.

"Let me beseech you," she wept, "to overlook this—this lapse. I cannot think what made me do it. But I have been overworking so terribly at the Girls' Friendly Society. Surely Mr. Dix will understand if I tell him that?"

Mr. Emms was just drawing himself up to administer a chilling reproof in the character of Blind Justice; he had even cleared his throat for the opening phrase; when a piercing shriek rang suddenly out from the inner room. He paused with his Adam's apple half raised.

The shriek was repeated.

"My God!" said Mr. Emms. "What was that?"

He darted one look at his fair prisoner, but she seemed in a state of complete collapse. The next moment he had flung himself at the inner door, and burst it open.

¶

THE sight which met his eyes was fully described at the inquest which, as an acquaintance of the Town Clerk, I had the privilege of attending in company with a friend of mine. I will now summarize it shortly.

Immediately inside the doorway, Miss Billingfield, the lady secretary, was lying senseless on the ground, and by the corner of his big desk, his arms outstretched over the carpet and his toupée gripped closely in one of his hands, was the body of Mr. Abraham Dix.

"Did you," asked the coroner, when this point had been reached, "notice anything else about the deceased?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Emms.

"Please describe it to us."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Emms, "I went over at once to see if there was anything as I could do, and I noticed immediately that the ends of Mr. Dix's trousers were stuffed inside his socks."

The coroner looked up sharply.

"Was that in accordance with the ordinary custom of the deceased?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Mr. Emms.

"And did you remark anything else?" continued the coroner.

"I also saw," replied Mr. Emms, "that Mr. Dix had what we call a traveller's sample of ribbon—a short length taken from a bundle which was lying on his desk—pinned diagonally, as one might say, across his waistcoat."

This, as you can imagine, was the point at which the reporters sharpened their

pencils and began to scent a mystery. But there was more to follow. When Mr. Emms had concluded his evidence, and had explained how it was that he was in the Managing Director's office; how, on turning from his first examination of the deceased, he had found the policeman for whom Miss Billingfield had telephoned just entering the room; and how the discovery was then made that the alleged shoplifter had taken advantage of the confusion to make her escape; and when the policeman had confirmed this part of the story, then Miss Billingfield herself was called.

"When," asked the coroner, "did you last see your employer alive?"

"About half-past ten," said Miss Billingfield, "when I finished taking his dictation."

"And between half-past ten and the time that you next entered the inner room," enquired the coroner, "what were you doing?"

"I was typing in my own room."

"The whole time?"

"The whole time."

"Did anyone else enter the deceased's office during this period?"

Miss Billingfield seemed to hesitate.

"I cannot say," she replied at last. "I heard Mr. Dix's voice speaking once, but he had a private telephone on his desk, and he may have been using that. He had had the bell muffled, so that even if it had rung, I shouldn't have heard it. Mr. Dix had a very loud voice, and he has often carried on conversations in the next room in which, from where I was, I could not hear the other party speaking."

"And on this particular morning," continued the coroner, "what was it that you heard the deceased say?"

Again Miss Billingfield hesitated, and then she answered: "First of all I heard him say, 'What?' He said it very loudly, and as if he was very much surprised. Then he said, 'But who are you?' or something like that. Then I heard him say, 'Are you sure there's no mistake? I only sent you ten thousand.' And then 'All right. Mum's the word. I quite understand.' And after that he dropped his voice, and I couldn't catch anything more. I thought at the time that he might be speaking to himself."

At this moment I looked round at Tom Headley, the man who had come with me to the inquest—he was a Member of Parliament, by the way, and I had known him for years—and to my astonishment I saw him half rise from his seat, with his jaw dropping and his eyes bursting right out of his head.

"What on earth's the matter?" I whispered.

"Nothing," he said hastily. "Nothing." And he sank back in his place.

I thought perhaps he was feeling faint.

"Would you like to go out?" I asked.

But the coroner tapped on his table with his pen.

"Silence!" he shouted, glaring at us.

Then came the medical evidence.

Dr. Woppingham, giving an address in Sloane Street, stated that he had been called by telephone to the Omniferous Stores on the morning in question. He had found the deceased lying as described, and examination had revealed that life had been extinct for over half-an-hour. He had attended Mr. Dix for many years, and though of course he was no longer a young man, there was, in his opinion, no reason why, with ordinary care, he should not have lived another fifteen or even twenty years. Any sudden shock might, however, have been very dangerous.

"Do you mean a physical shock?" asked the coroner.

"Physical or mental," said the doctor.

"And in your opinion," the coroner continued, "what was the actual cause which brought about the deceased's end?"

"Heart failure," said the doctor, "following such shock. I found at the base of the *os occipitis* a severe, suffused contusion; but I am unable to state whether this resulted from the manner in which the deceased fell, or whether it was produced by some blunt instrument before the fall took place."

"In the latter event," asked the coroner, "could this injury, in your opinion, have been self-inflicted?"

"In my opinion," said Dr. Woppingham, "that would have been impossible."

"And did you discover in the room any such instrument as you describe?"

"No," said the doctor. And then he added: "I didn't look."

The coroner made a careful note of this answer, and then he went on.

"One more question, Dr. Woppingham. Have you any theory which will explain, from a medical standpoint, the unusual condition of the deceased's clothing?"

" No," said the doctor again.

" Thank you," said the coroner. " I will not detain you any longer." And Dr. Woppingham bowed and left the court.

But the mysterious part of the affair wasn't over yet.

¶

THE next witness was Mr. Hilary Bennett, a director of the Omniferous Stores. He stated that he had arrived on the scene a few minutes after the discovery had been made, to keep an appointment with Mr. Dix. Seeing that the doctor was in charge in the private office, and hearing from Mr. Emms of the shoplifter's escape, he had first gone back to the doorway which communicated with the main store; but the commissionaire, who had been on duty there since ten o'clock, was positive that no one had left Mr. Dix's suite by that route during the whole of the previous hour. Then he had run down the private stairway which led direct to the street, and had discovered that the door at the bottom of it was open. At the time, this had only struck him as explaining how the shoplifter had got away; but he had since been informed that it was Mr. Dix's invariable custom to lock this door from the inside after he arrived each morning, with a key which he carried in his waistcoat pocket. Miss Billingfield could doubtless confirm this.

" In other words," said the coroner, cutting him short, " the door leading to the street must have been open ever since half-past nine ? "

" Not necessarily open," said Mr. Bennett carefully. " But it would have been possible for anyone to open it from the inside by turning the handle of the latch. If the door were shut, it could not be opened from outside without the key."

There was a rustle in the court-room as those present tried to see where this answer was leading them.

" And did you inform the constable of your discovery ? " the coroner pursued.

" Yes," said Mr. Bennett. " And acting on my suggestion he searched Mr. Dix's pockets for the key."

" And he found it ? "

" No," said Mr. Bennett, impressively. " The key was not there."

There was another quickly-subdued rustle in the court.

" Now tell me, Mr. Bennett," the coroner continued, " have you, with the close knowledge of the deceased's business affairs which you must possess, any information which will explain the statement made by a previous witness that she heard the deceased remark, ' But I only sent you ten thousand ' ? "

Mr. Bennett shook his head.

" No, sir," he said.

The coroner looked up, and smiled the smile which indicates prior knowledge of the answer which is to be made to a question.

" Will you tell the jury," he said, " what you found on the deceased's desk ? "

" On Mr. Dix's desk," said Mr. Bennett, " I found a sheet of his private notepaper, and written on it in his own handwriting were the words, ' Lord Knightsbridge.' "

" Nothing else ? "

" Nothing else."

" Just let the jury see that exhibit," said the coroner, turning to a police-officer; and the sheet of notepaper was handed round for the twelve jurors to inspect.

When it came back to the coroner again, he turned once more to Mr. Bennett and asked: " Have you any knowledge of any dealings which the deceased had with any person known as Lord Knightsbridge ? "

" No, sir," said Mr. Bennett.

" Thank you," said the coroner. " Now just one more question. Has there come to your notice during the past months any indication of a feeling on the part of any of the deceased's employees which might have led any of them to wish to do the deceased any kind of injury ? "

Before Mr. Bennett could answer, a man at the back of the court rose suddenly to his feet.

" As General Secretary to the Amalgamated Society of Retailers' Assistants and Auxiliaries," he shouted, " I protest against that question being put."

" Silence, sir ! " barked the coroner. " What is your name ? "

The man bobbed up again.

" Holzapfel," he answered.

" Kindly leave the court at once," said the coroner.

The interrupter folded his arms.

" I have made my protest," he said with great dignity, and then, rather to my surprise, he actually did leave. Perhaps he mistrusted the look in the eye of the policeman who had begun edging towards him.

" Now, sir," resumed the coroner,

turning again to Mr. Bennett. "Let me repeat my last question." And he repeated it.

"Must I answer that?" asked Mr. Bennett, looking nervously towards the spectators at the back of the room.

"It is a very important point," said the coroner.

"Then if you insist," said Mr. Bennett, "I must inform you that about a fortnight ago Mr. Dix posted a notice on the employees' notice-board forbidding the further use inside the building of openwork stockings."

As the coroner glared angrily round the court, the murmur of indignation which had arisen died suddenly away.

"Thank you, Mr. Bennett," he concluded And Mr. Bennett withdrew.

The coroner consulted a slip of paper.

"Call Mr. Purdy," he said.

A lean man, with an incredibly high collar, stepped forward and took the oath.

"Now then, Mr. Purdy," said the coroner, "you are, I believe, a cashier at the Brompton Road branch of the Great Southern and Metropolitan Bank?"

"That is so," agreed the witness.

"You knew the deceased by sight?"

"I did."

"And are acquainted with the details of his account?"

"I am."

"So that if the deceased had recently received or paid out any large sum of money—let us say, ten thousand pounds—you would have knowledge of this?"

"I would," said Mr. Purdy.

"Can you tell us, then, whether, in fact, the deceased did in the course of the last few weeks pass any such large sum through his account?"

"On the seventh instant," replied Mr. Purdy, in a sing-song voice, "Mr. Dix called at the bank at nine-twenty a.m. in the forenoon, and presented an open cheque, payable to self and endorsed on the reverse, for ten thousand pounds sterling. The whole sum was immediately paid over to him in banknotes. The numbers of those notes were——"

Here the coroner raised his hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Purdy," he interrupted. "The police have asked that the numbers of the notes should not for the present be disclosed."

Mr. Purdy bowed, and another thrill ran round the court. Surely, I felt, we must be getting somewhere at last.

But with the next witness the coroner started off on a still further tack.

"You are, I believe," he said, addressing the surly-looking man who had just been called and sworn, "a Deputy-Divisional Traffic Superintendent in the employ of the London Telephone Service?"

The surly-looking man nodded.

"Speak up, please," said the coroner.

"That's right," said the witness.

"Have you a record of any calls originating from or being received by 'Western 9606'—the number of the deceased's private line—on the morning that the deceased met with his death?"

"No," said the witness.

"Such records are, I suppose, kept?" enquired the coroner, with one eye on the reporters' table.

"Not of incoming calls, they aren't," said the witness.

"But of outgoing calls?"

"That's right."

"So that if Mr. Dix had originated a call that morning your department would have a record of it?"

"No," said the witness.

"Why not?" asked the coroner sharply.

"Because the line was out of order and being tested for repairs," said the surly-looking man.

"Oh," said the coroner, scowling at the back of the court. "You may stand down, sir."

The witness withdrew, and the coroner held a brief, whispered conversation with a man who looked as if he might once have been a police inspector. Then he rose to his feet again.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I had hoped to be able to conclude our enquiry in one sitting, but the evidence which has been given to-day makes this, I am afraid, impossible. It is clearly essential, before we are able to reach a proper decision, that two—at least—of the points which have been referred to should be cleared up. First of all, an effort must be made to trace the ten thousand pounds in banknotes which were known to be in the deceased's possession twenty-four hours before his death. And secondly, it is of the utmost importance that Lord Knightsbridge should attend, so that he may be asked if he can explain why it was that deceased should have occupied his last moments in writing his lordship's name on this sheet of

notepaper. The inquest will therefore be adjourned until——"

But here the most extraordinary interruption took place. Tom Headley, for whom, at his own request, I had secured admission to the court, and who might therefore, you would have thought, have taken care to do nothing that would bring discredit on his introducer, suddenly raised his voice and called out: "But there isn't any such title! How can you summon a man who doesn't exist?"

In an instant we seemed the centre of a hundred pairs of curious or angry eyes. But already the coroner's last words had caused people to begin rising and moving towards the doors. With one hand I dealt Tom Headley a violent blow in the wind, and with the other I pointed indignantly at an old man sitting just in front of us. As I hurried my friend away, I had the satisfaction of seeing a specially large policeman clambering over the seats towards the innocent victim of my ruse.

But as soon as we were clear of the court-room I turned impatiently to Tom.

"What the dickens do you mean," I asked, "by shouting out like that? And besides, anyway, how do you know there isn't a Lord Knightsbridge? Can't you credit that coroner with any kind of sense at all?"

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," said Tom, still rubbing his waistcoat. "I apologize like anything. But do you really suppose that I've spent two years in the Whips' Office without knowing something about the peerage? Of course there's no Lord Knightsbridge. There never has been."

"Well," I protested, "even so, what has it got to do with you?"

"Look here," said Tom, disregarding this question, "if I give you my solemn word not to utter a sound, will you try and get me into the inquest again next time? I've get a very special reason. I can't tell you what it is now; but if ever I can, I promise I will."

"Does that mean that you're the murderer?" I asked, smiling at his earnestness.

He jumped as if he had been shot.

"No, no," he said quickly. And then he added enigmatically, "At least, if I am, I'll tell you as soon as I'm sure."

And with this I had to be content.

The newspapers the next day were full of the coroner's mistake. But in the general excitement that the inquest had aroused I doubt if the public as a whole paid much attention to it. They were too busy discussing the numerous remarkable features of the affair itself. Some people thought that Mr. Dix had been murdered by the shoplifter earlier in the morning, others suspected Miss Billingfield, others plumped for Mr. Holzapfel or one of his minions. Every hour a fresh rumour of the impending bankruptcy of the Omniferous Stores was started, but this was at length knocked on the head by an official pronouncement from the surviving directors. The strange condition of the deceased's trousers and waistcoat suggested to many ingenious minds that the crime was the work of some secret society, whose mercy Mr. Dix had sought in vain to purchase with the ten thousand pounds in bank-notes. I can hardly describe the fantastic theories which were showered on one wherever one went. Every morning the newspaper headlines said that important developments were expected in the next twenty-four hours, and every evening they asked contemptuously what the police thought they were doing.

¶

ON the day that the inquest was resumed, the streets round the coroner's court were packed with a seething mob. But once again I had succeeded in obtaining two cards of admission from my friend the Town Clerk, and Tom Headley and I fought our way triumphantly into the room. There was a hushed silence when the coroner rose to address the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said, "since this enquiry was opened, there have been two developments to which I think it necessary to draw your immediate attention. In the first place, a search by the police at the deceased's residence has resulted in the discovery of the keys of his private entrance to the Stores. They were, in short, lying on the top of his dressing-table. It seems clear, therefore, that on this particular morning the deceased must have reached his office through one of the main entrances, and that no one could subsequently have gained admission to his suite by means of the private stairway unless they possessed a duplicate key.

"In the second place, a statement has been made to me by Mr. McQuantock, the manager of the deceased's bank that the

ten thousand pounds in bank-notes have been returned to him intact, and in circumstances which he considers, and, I may add, that I myself consider, entirely satisfactory. There are very important reasons why these circumstances should not be made public, and unless the jury insist, I should very much prefer that the incident should be considered as closed."

He paused for a moment, and though the jury looked as bewildered and inquisitive as the rest of us, none of them had the courage to ask what he meant. So he went on again: "Having thus disposed of the question of both the opportunity and the motive by which the deceased might have met his end at the hands of a fellow creature, I feel justified in asking the jury to return a verdict of 'Death from heart failure, the result of an accidental fall,' in accordance with the medical evidence."

There was a gasp of surprise from the crowded room. Inexperienced as most of those present must have been in the ways of the law, common sense was enough to tell them that the coroner had rushed at his decision in total disregard of quite half the facts of the case, not to mention their own very natural wish to be provided with the sensational disclosures which the Press had been promising them for a week. But the coroner had his jury well in hand. After a pretence of consultation, the foreman rose and returned the verdict which had been put into his mouth, he and his colleagues were discharged, and the police began clearing the court.

I turned to Tom Headley, and found him wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Thank heaven," he murmured, "that a British jury still does what it's told. Come back to my flat, and I'll tell you a secret."

In another ten minutes we were sitting over his fire, and this is the story that he confided to me:

"On the morning of the eighth—the day that Dix died—a registered parcel was brought to me at the Whips' Office. It contained ten thousand pounds in bank-notes and a letter from Mr. Dix. He said that he understood that a payment of this sum to the party funds would secure for him a knighthood, and he would be obliged for our formal receipt and an assurance that the thing would be put through at once. I may say that as far as I was concerned I was all for letting him have it. But the Chief said, No. He didn't know the man, and he wouldn't trust him not to give the show away. Ten thousand pounds would be useful enough, but with all the talk there had been of the purity of the fountain of honour, we couldn't afford to run risks with a stranger. He asked me to take the money back to Mr. Dix, and explain that he was labouring under a misapprehension.

"Very well, then. By the same post I had a line from Dick Porphyry—you know, the Under-Secretary to the Duchy of Lancaster. He'd been promised a peerage some time ago, but we'd put it off because his seat wasn't any too safe. Now he said that he must have it at once, because his doctor had ordered him abroad for a year, and he would have to resign in any case. I spoke to the Chief, and he said 'Yes, that's all right. Ring him up and tell him we'll put it through at once.'

"I asked my secretary to get him on the telephone, but I suppose now that I must have handed him the wrong letter by mistake. Anyhow, when my bell rang, I said, 'Is that you, Dick?'

"'Yes,' said the voice at the other end.

"I said, 'I say, it's all right about your peerage.'

"He said, 'What?' It sounded as though he were surprised.

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**DECEMBER 2**



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" I said, ' It's all about your peerage. It'll be in the New Year's List.'

" He said, ' But who are you ? '

" ' Headley, of the Whips' Office,' I said.

" ' Are you sure there's no mistake ? ' I heard him ask. ' I only sent you ten thousand.'

" I couldn't make out what he was getting at.

" ' Ten thousand what ? ' I said. ' I don't follow you.'

" ' All right,' he answered. ' Mum's the word. I quite understand.' And he rang off.

" It sounds stupid, I know, but it wasn't until he was gone that I realized what had happened. Through giving my secretary the wrong number, I had been speaking to what the coroner calls ' the deceased.' I ran and told the Chief at once. He said I must go round and explain to Dix what I'd done. I didn't relish this particularly, but I hustled into a cab straight off. When I got to the Stores, I found that he was dead.

" I was in a devil of a stew, but there was only one thing to be done. I went back and told the Chief, and he said, ' Go to the inquest and see what happens. We'll return the money to Dix's bank, and if necessary I must try and square the coroner. Fortunately, he's a member of the local association.'

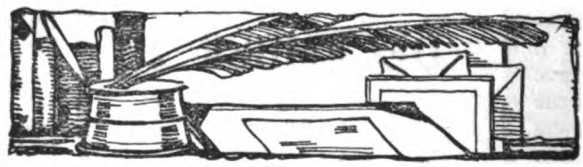
" Well, that's what we did. You see now why the doctor was so certain that poor old Dix had died from shock. Anyone would, who got a peerage as cheap as that. As for ' Lord Knightsbridge,' of course, the explanation is that he was practising writing his new title. And as for his clothes, isn't it obvious that he wanted to see what he would look like in Court Dress ? "

I stared at Tom in amazement. And then a thought struck me.

" Yes," I said. " But why did the telephone witness say that the line was out of order ? "

Tom laughed.

" Stop and think," he said. " Does the London Telephone Service *ever* know which of its lines are out of order ? Of course it doesn't. Besides, the Postmaster-General is going to get a peerage too."



## *Sir Richard Steele on Quacks*

THE doctor is lately come from his travels, and has practised both by sea and land, and therefore cures the green-sickness, long sea-voyages and campaigns. Both sea and land ! I will not answer for the distempers called " sea-voyages, and campaigns," but I dare say that of green-sickness might be as well taken care of if the doctor stayed ashore. But the art of managing mankind is only to make them stare a little to keep up their astonishment ; to let nothing be familiar to them, but ever to have something in their sleeve, in which they must think you are deeper than they are.

There is an ingenious fellow, a barber, of my acquaintance, who, besides his broken fiddle and a dried sea-monster, has a twine-cord, strained with two nails at each end, over his window, and the words " rainy, dry, wet," and so forth, written to denote the weather, according to the rising or falling of the cord.

I observed a very honest fellow, a chance customer, who sat in the chair before me to be shaved, fix his eye upon this miraculous performance during the operation upon his chin and face. When those and his head also were cleared of all incumbrances and excrescences, he looked at the fish, then at the fiddle, still grubling in his pockets, and casting his eye again at the twine, and the words writ on each side ; then altered his mind as to farthings, and gave my friend a silver sixpence.

# "Gold Muzzle"

*Concerning the home-coming of Sir Julian Standish, ex-Jacobite*

By AGNES & EGERTON CASTLE

MASTER TOBY PUCKETT awoke with a slight start from his doze in the inglenook of the snuggery, where the warmth of a sea-coal fire and a tankard of nappy Warrington ale had combined to draw him into the depths of pleasant dreams. The sound that had brought him back into the workaday world was that of hoofs ringing clear on the hard-frozen ground and loud in the silence of the deserted street. The steady clip-clap suddenly ceased; and it did not require the impatient and masterful cry of, "House, there!" that presently arose, to make it patent that a guest was alighting at the sign of the Stag's Head.

Master Puckett was the landlord of that hostelry, undoubtedly the best in Liverpool—and, indeed, the only one fitted these days for the entertainment of gentry—a house, despite the overshadowing proximity of the old town-hall, of distinguished appearance, with its goodly half-timbered front and gables, and its noble sign of the Stanley cognisance stretching boldly over its footway. A house, moreover, felicitously placed, well away from the rowdiness and squalor of the water-side, at the corner of the High and Dale streets—close, it is true, to the very outskirts of the town (as it stood in first George's days), but the better situated in regard to the main highway stretching to the north towards Scotland and southwards to the great, distant metropolis.

The Stag's Head was a busy hostelry and a prosperous. But in this cruel frost—the cold of the December, 1724, was destined to be long remembered—none who could possibly keep at home were tempted abroad; the place had been empty of guests the whole day, and with the coming of night had fallen into a state of all but general somnolence.

"Moggie"—Master Puckett, leaping out of his cosy nap, bellowed into the recesses of the house—"horse and rider! Call up Jack, and sharply, you slut!"

Rising from the wooden settle, he reached for his fur cap, pulled it over his ears, and moved in conscious dignity to open the portals himself—for the house was jealously closed against the freezing air.

"Welcome, sir."

The newcomer was in the act of dismounting, stiffly and painfully. The horse, half-hidden within a nimbus of steam, neighed delightedly on the appearance of ostler Jack.

"An infernal cold ride, landlord," said the traveller from rigid lips over his manifolded muffler.

"Faith, it must have been that, sir!" Mine host rubbed his red hands. "From Warrington—Prescott?" he said, all genuine sympathy.

"Ay, and from further still, if you must know, my man. From London these three days—from Macclesfield this morning. Show the way, my good fellow, show the way!"

"Macclesfield! Why, 'tis more than forty miles, and in this weather! But I'll warrant—observe the step, sir. I marvel not at your being stiff—I'll warrant the welcome of the Stag's Head will make you forget them. Welcome, sir," he repeated with a bow, as the guest walked in.

Master Puckett had a ripe experience of gentry, and could recognize it, however muffled, at a glance.

"Now, Jack," he cried genially, "number three loose-box, straw up to the shoulders, a warm cloth, and a warm mash! Said I right, sir? I thought so. The mount's comfort first with your true horseman after a hard ride. This way, sir. Ho there, Moggie, stir up a blaze in the Lion! His honour's valise, and his pistols out of the holsters, to the Lion! The Lion for your honour, if it please you, sir. It is, as I may say, the best among our five best rooms.

Meanwhile, you will, if I may advise, come within the bar—the snuggery we call it—and unfreeze your toes by the fire. Shrewd weather—I disremember such a frost since I came to this town. And what will your honour be pleased to drink? May I be allowed to recommend a mug of my old ale, mulled hot with cloves and a dash of cinnamon and nutmeg? Yes? So! Jenny, mulled ale—in three minutes, d'ye hear? Stir yourself, the gentleman perishes."

Thus rattling with professional cheeriness, the landlord helped the guest to divest himself of riding-coat and wrappings, furred gloves, and spatterdashes. And the visitor, gratefully bending towards the warmth of the hearth, stood revealed—most unmistakably, as mine host had surmised even through the ill-lit gloom of the doorsteps—a gentleman. A man just passing out of first youth, of strong presence and marked features; not specially handsome, perhaps, but of that clear patrician cut which suggest the old family strain. One trait of striking personality stood out especially noticeable under the light of the hanging lamp immediately over his head—the singular fairness of the hair, which he wore, traveller's fashion, simply tied in a queue; hair of that light golden yellow, so rarely seen, which runs as a family feature through certain races of Saxon ancestry.

His garb, sober mulberry in colour, but broidered with great taste in silvers and greens of latest fashion, proclaimed the man of town. Such a cut of clothes was not of far-lying counties. Under the skirt of the coat glinted the chased-steel hilt of a small hanger—more suitable companion for high-road travel than the rapier of town wear.

Mine host surveyed his guest with an appraising air:

"What name, sir, shall I put down to your honour in my books?" he asked, presenting the tankard he had taken from the waiting-maid's hands.

The visitor took a long draught of the comforting brew; and then, in a pause, looking at the man over the brim:

"Is that necessary?" he asked, in an indifferent voice. "I am given the Lion, if I heard aright. Why, then, can you not make out the reckoning to the Lion? 'Tis usual enough, is it not?" He emptied the tankard and handed it back. "Bah!" he went on, noting the disappointed air—Master Puckett loved of all things a record of his guests' quality—"Why not, after all, since you will have it? You may put down Sir Everard Standish."

Then, with a sudden keen look:

"Hast ever heard that name spoken of, man?" he asked. "In former days, I mean? How long have you lived in this detestable Liverpool—how long have you lived in this Whiggish hole?"

Master Puckett was slightly flustered by the abrupt change in the visitor's manner. The latter, without waiting for response, pursued, resuming his tone of indifference:

"Sir Everard Standish, of Red Hall, Welwyn, in Hertfordshire."

Master Puckett bowed.

"Excellent well, sir." Then, tentatively, "I hope the Stag's Head may have the honour of your patronage for some time, sir. It will do its best, sir; this is scarce travelling weather."

"That, my friend, will hang on what I find waiting for me in this place. To-night of a certainty. So now—for that Lion of yours."

The landlord selected among the rows of luminaries displayed on the dresser—ranging from the burnished brass to the silver candleholder—a two-branched candelabrum; lighted it with an air, and prepared to lead the way. But, before passing out of the snuggery, the visitor paused:

"Yes," he said, as if pursuing aloud some hauntiug thought, "all depends on what I find here. Do you happen," he asked, with a return of abruptness, "to know anyone of the name of Marnock? A Captain Marnock, master of the *Isabelle*. West Indian trade, some say. Others speak of the new African slave traffic—Captain Marnock. Come, a landlord knows most of the native names."

Master Puckett had halted and dutifully put on a cogitative look. But at last he shook his head.

"Marnock—Marnock? No, sir. I do not know the name. You see, sir," he explained, not without a tinge of offence in his apologetic tone, "the Stag's Head is no place of call for sea captains. There are inns enough and taverns enough for that kind by the water-side. At this end of the town—but I will make inquiries, sir, and no later than the morning," he added, with a prompt return to subservience.

"No matter—I shall no doubt find the man, aboard or on shore."

And thus closing the subject, the visitor

followed his guide up the creaking wooden stairs.

"Supper, sir, I may presume?" said mine host, on the threshold of the Lion. "Yes, sir, within the half-hour. I would suggest, under favour, in the snuggery itself—the house being empty and all at your honour's disposal—the one really warm room this flinty weather. And, in due time, the warming-pan to the sheets? Good! Your honour's valise is on the wood-chest. And so my service to you, sir."

Left alone, the traveller drew the arm-chair to the fireside, stretched his legs to the glow, and, pending the announcement of supper, yielded himself to a deep reverie.

What news had the morrow in store for him?

## II

MASTER PUCKETT also sought his fireside for another cup and a pipe of Virginia, pending the moment when, to while away the undoubtedly slack time, he would himself wait upon his solitary guest. And he mused.

A fine gentleman must indeed have pressing business to cover fifty miles of highway on such a day. "Sir Everard Standish—why not, after all?" he had said. Ay, why should he not? A fine gentleman. Standish? Standish of Welwyn, Hertfordshire. That was a southern county, London way—yet Standish was a North Country name—though he disremembered ever having had a Standish among his guets. Stay, though—odd, the name did recall something. Zooks, he had it now!

Master Puckett jumped up from his cosy corner and went to a certain cupboard of the inner sanctum; and, after some rummaging among old papers, books long disused and such gear, came upon what he sought. This was a roughly-printed broadside, recording the names of the prisoners captured during the futile rising of Lord Derwentwater "in the 'fifteen," and tried in this very Liverpool—now nearly ten years back.

Liverpool—strange stronghold of Whiggism in the heart of a Lancashire Tory to the core—had been well chosen as a place of trial; its townsmen could safely be trusted to supply none but properly disposed jurymen. Tobias Puckett, however, though a freeman of the town, being known as mildly disposed towards a cause which the gentry his patrons supported, had not been drafted on these subservient juries. But he had watched, mournfully enough, the shameful legal work which sent to the gallows thirty-four gentlemen of blood—to the gallows, with the due accompaniment of drawing and quartering—and some hundreds of others to the torture of slavery in the plantations of Virginia and the West Indies.

It was as a kind of tribute to the memory of the luckless victims that he had preserved this broadside. Hastily now, drawing it close to the lamplight, he scanned the ill-printed list, footed by the inevitable *Vivat Rex*.

Standish? No Standish among the executions. Ah, but here it was, sure enough, among the names reserved for the plantations—Julian Standish, gentleman.

At first the idea had flashed across Master Puckett's brain that his guest himself might be—but no! Here, in the sheet, was a Julian; and he upstairs, in Lion, was a Sir Everard. A son perhaps? No, the man was still too young to have had, ten years ago, a son capable of bearing arms. A brother, then? A brother, maybe, embarked on board one of those slave-trade ships that had, Puckett recalled, been impressed to carry without a day's delay, a white cargo away from the help of any friends to the earthly hell of the plantations. Yes, that was it! "Captain Marnock, of the *Isabelle*, West Indian trade, or, rather," had said the inquirer, "of that new African trade." The *Isabelle*, thought the landlord of Tory sympathies, was that his ship? These Liverpool owners had made rare profits by the freight of white flesh and the ultimate sale. But the broadsheet bore no record of any vessel's or captain's name. A strange long while, anyhow, after the event to make inquiries.

The landlord put back the paper into its resting place, and relit his pipe to help further speculation upon the probable nature of the Captain Marnock of the *Isabelle*, whom this fine gentleman had ridden so far and so coldly to meet.

Master Puckett was by no means a man of out-of-the-way sagacity; but his meditation by the snuggery hearth had, curiously enough, evoked the very figure that was the subject of the firelight musings in the Lion. A brother it was, the same Julian Standish, that filled the traveller's thoughts as, chin

in palm, he stared unseeingly into the glowing cavern of the hearth. An elder brother, and—inordinate affection for the heir by priority is no foregone conclusion among brothers—one who had been loved and long mourned. Elder and younger sons; but there was but a year between them. By their looks, the two golden-haired, grey-eyed boys might have been twins; with all but the most intimate the one might any day have passed for the other.

Many a time, indeed, the present Sir Everard, catching in some unexpected mirror a sight of himself, had called out in his soul: "Gad, there went Julian, dear lad!" A ghost—a comely ghost, rising to greet him behind that silent screen of glass. Ten years it was, and more, since he had beheld him in the flesh.

A whole decade! Long span in man's spring of life, however lightning swift it may seem to flit by in the days of its autumn! In Sir Everard, active sorrow had long been softened into a vaguely tender regret for the lost days of boyhood comradeship. When the memory did arise, it was still of "Julian, dear lad!" with a melancholy smile; but it fleeted and melted into the work-a-day thought, as the wisp of sunrise vapours over the meadows loses itself in the morning's breath. The younger brother had moved to a life of broader horizons; the recognized heir to a noble estate; in due course stepping into the post and filling it with dignity.

And now, behold, what changes in life's perspective, all worked by the arrival of a letter. It was but a week ago! A letter which might have been from the next world, so utterly was its possibility undreamed of, reaching the ancient Hertfordshire home from a small West Indian island.

The man in the armchair, at some turning-point of his reverie, looked up and gazed, still dreamily, round the sombre room. His eye lighted on the dressing-table with its looking-glass, by the silver candlestick. A quaint thought urged him to get up and plant himself in front of the mirror.

". . . So there you stand—unless the years have left their mark differently on you, Julian! I will not say Sir Julian. No, Julian, dear lad, let me see your own mouth speak the wondrous news!"

And, in a kind of wistful mockery, he repeated the opening words of that screed, which even then lay in his pocket, on his heart. That letter—he had conned it so often—with the strangest mixed feelings, that every word was as graven before his mental vision:

"Everard, dear lad—yes, in truth, these words come from me; and how I wish I could see your face as you receive the astounding news! And not many weeks, perhaps days, after it reaches you expect to see the sender in person."

Everard, in the Lion, smiled wistfully; and, from his looking-glass chamber, Julian smiled back. The two contemplated each other for yet a spell; then, with a nod, the guest of the Stag's Head turned pensively and went back to his armchair. He pulled out his wallet, and, for the twentieth time, perhaps, went over the message from distant Caribbean seas:

". . . Expect to see the sender in person," he read on. "And I know thee too well—even had I not heard at last, and that less than a month ago, how you have worked to save me—not to feel sure of my welcome."

How you have worked to save me! Ay, looking back upon the task he had set himself, these ten years back, Everard could feel fully conscious that, indeed, he had left no stone unturned.

When the thunderbolt news had reached Red Hall that among the condemned of the Liverpool trial was to be found the name of the young heir; nay, that so swift had been the stroke of political vengeance, the deporting ship was already at sea; frantic, unrelenting had been the efforts to obtain a Royal pardon. The plea was appealing—a lad barely twenty, acting on a madcap impulse, while the guest of some Jacobite relatives in the North. The Standishes of Red Hall were not known for aught but loyal acceptance of the Protestant succession. A young man's folly—the mere contagion of example. Well, the Whigs had had their full satisfaction: Jacobite heads in sufficient numbers were spiked over town and castle gateways. An act of clemency could not hurt the cause of the Hanoverian line—and the case of Julian Standish was the one instance of Royal pardon in the rising of "'fifteen." Julian Standish might be rescued from among the helots of the plantations—if he could be found.

Armed with this document of Royal magnanimity, Everard had started in search of Julian. So utterly lost were the wretches disposed of like cattle by the Liverpool

skippers that, the sale over, not even a record of the transactions was preserved. A year of search elapsed before Everard came upon the planter who had purchased his brother; and even then the chase proved fruitless.

"The youth!" Yes, the planter who had purchased freeborn Englishmen to work alongside African slaves remembered him well. "The youth had made his escape; turned maroon—only to die, of course, as all maroons sooner or later do, of fever or starvation, if not of Indians. A good-looking youth, the planter had noted him favourably, indeed, had treated him—or so he thought—with marked leniency. But the youth had gone. It was a loss."

And at last Everard had sailed back, to land again in England with a hatred in his heart for Hanoverian and Whig which had not been there before the "'fifteen." To find also that in his absence the heirship of Red Hall had fallen to him.

Sir Everard's eyes turned back to the sheet in his hand.

". . . not to feel sure of my welcome, although you are, of a certainty by this time, the ruler at Red Hall. Indeed, the old gentleman, dear soul, was already ailing when I let myself be drawn into that Bedlamite enterprise.

"By the lord, what shall I not have to tell thee—under the rose, dear lad, strictly under the rose, for it is an incredible Odyssey—of all that befell the Jacobite slave after he escaped from Virginian plantations to the French hospitality of Louisiana!

"I have borne many names—cast off like the snake's skin; it is *peau neuve* with me—I had become very French until I found out that I could resume my honoured English name. But that is a long tale, and not one to put on paper.

"I write this from St. Vierge Island, and it will go to you—God willing—through the courtesy of Captain Surtees, whose corvette *Albatross* yesterday dropped anchor in my bay—for it is my island, if you please! Oh, the tales I have for you! When I called on his board, having, since the blessed news, no reason to keep my name secret, he actually offered me a passage home with him. But I required a week to collect my goods and chattels. As a matter of fact, I shall return again—God willing! One can never too often put in such a prayer, for this is a precarious world, Everard, as I have proved. I shall return on board the *Isabelle*, barquentine, Captain Marnock. She sails in some ten days, a swift vessel, I understand, and should be due at Liverpool soon after the turn of the year."

. . . The turn of the year! It was now nearing February; and, save for that phantasm in the mirror, the sight of the dear lad had not been vouchsafed. Yet the *Isabelle* had come to port. What might that other letter portend?

*Sedet atra cura!* The black care that had sat beside him during that interminable posting from London to Macclesfield, and again, all day in the saddle, during the last ride, jumped on to the shoulder afresh, as he drew another sheet from his wallet, and frowningly scanned it. It was a brief note—the same that had started him on his flight northwards through this forbidding pall of frost.

"Honoured Sir (wrote the man of business in London),

"I have just received news, incidentally, from a correspondent in Liverpool, that among the arrivals in port was the *Isabelle*, with West India cargo. This, it seems, was a week ago.

"Knowing your deep anxiety concerning this vessel, knowing also that, when I had the honour of seeing you yesterday, you had as yet received no news of your brother—which seems to me, in the circumstances, strange and somewhat alarming—with all haste I send you this report, in case you should think fit to have inquiries pursued on the spot.

"You know, honoured sir, my devotion to your family; and I beg to assure you that I am prepared to start upon the journey myself, unless you should prefer to undertake the matter in person——"

Sir Everard thrust back the letters into his pocket-book, got up and wearily paced once or twice round the room. Well, to-morrow, no doubt, he would know. To-morrow! How far off to-morrow can look! It seemed to him that he could never sleep, at the end of this long journey with such doubts and misgivings squatting on his pillow by his ear.

He lifted the window curtains and peered out into the silent frost-bound street. And, weary as he was, he balanced upon the idea of sallying forthwith to the

waterside, by hook or by crook to get speech, if not of this Captain Marnock himself, at least of someone belonging to the vessel.

At this moment, mine host made his appearance with the announcement of supper. And, in answer to a tentative inquiry, he promptly exposed its futility.

On such a night — and there was a convincing emphasis in his tone — the Mersey-side would be as deserted as the Gallowsfield itself. One chance in ten thousand if a soul could be found to guide a stranger to any particular ship in harbour —unless his honour were prepared to visit every drinking ken and tavern of old Goree. With all respect, the suggestion was mad.

## III

"WELL, landlord," said Sir Everard, at the conclusion of his much-wanted meal, "I owe it to you to have spent this hour more profitably, no doubt, than roaming an unknown town. It is odd thinking, though," he went on, refilling his beaker, "that in such quarters as these I should be a solitary guest. Bring a glass for yourself—this burgundy is too good stuff to be drunk in solitude. What a stillness in the town!" he went on, after a musing pause, during which Mr. Puckett had filled and emptied his cup in silent appreciation of his own wares. "The world, in truth, seems frozen!—Begad, but you are wanted, after all, my friend."

There had come the sound of rapid steps outside, then a hearty rap at the closed shutters.

Master Puckett hastily put down his glass and hurried away, presently to usher in a visitor muffled to the eyes.

"Why, Toby Puckett, my buck!" cried the newcomer, as he unceremoniously pushed open the door of the snuggery. "For a moment, curse me if I did not think you had already retired under your nightcap, so dim looked your old nook!

"Why, 'tis young Mr. Rendall," said the host, receiving the cloak which was tossed towards him. "Glad to see you, sir; though who would have thought—— But before asking other questions, what are you pleased to order?"

"Anything, Puckett, anything, so it be strong and warming!"

"I can recommend the spiced ale; I have proved it myself this evening," put in Sir Everard from his seat, bending slightly to the newcomer.

There was something about the cheery bearing of the young man which, in an odd, sudden manner, had appealed to him in the midst of his own melancholy trend of thought. Here was one with good looks, of the healthy, *bon-vivant* order; smiling eyes and lips readily parting—withal a touch, through his country heartiness, which seemed to reveal some acquaintance with the life and manners of the town.

"Who would have thought, say you Puckett, that I should have to spend the night away from home, without as much as a portmantle, eh? Not I, certes, an hour ago, when I left the Provost's dining-table; the conclusion of a day's arduous business, if you'll believe me, Puckett. I was but a little late on the quay, where my galley crew was to wait for me at eight to take me back with the tide to Bebington. The skiff was there, moored safe enough; but of my four rascals only one to be seen, and the swine drunk as an owl! No crossing over to-night. What to do? Provost's house? Nay, nay, better; honest Puckett, comfortable Puckett! To-morrow the reckoning with my knaves, when I find them; to-night, the Stag's Head, the feather bed in the Rose!"

"Ay, Mr. Rendall, a blessing in disguise, as the saying is. An hour's rowing and more over the Mersey in this weather, ugh! Instead of which the Rose, when you please. Moggie, lass, make ready the Rose, and, meanwhile, the company of a London gentleman who was inclined to find the Stag's Head so sleepy dull that he was all for going out, if you'll believe me, to seek some ship that he is curious about. To the harbour, aha!—forgive my presuming to laugh, but the harbour, this night! But, perhaps, a hand at the *cartes* for an hour or so—in the Lion—till the Rose is warm?"

Mine host looked so ingratiatingly from one to the other that neither of his two guests could forbear a smile.

"If Mr. Rendall—I heard aright?" ("Mr. Charles Rendall, of Bebington Park, Cheshire," interposed Master Puckett, deferentially.) "If Mr. Rendall will help me to shorten the night hours."

"'Pon honour, a pleasing proposal, sir?" (And again mine host proclaimed with full appreciation of the quality under his roof: "Sir Everard Standish.") "A most excellent prospect! Bustle, Puckett—the green

cloth, the picture-boards—ah, and a bowl of your noblest punch!"

Intent only on killing time and dulling speculation, Sir Everard followed his host up the cracking stairs with his mercurial companion. And little did he think that here were the first steps on the way to a solution of what, but for the drunkenness of a galley's crew which had sent this fellow guest across his path, would have remained for ever a mystery.

¶

THE last strokes of ten were vibrating from the clock turret hard by in the old town hall when Mr. Rendall pushed forward the remaining few pieces of gold of a pile, which, after varying fortunes during a gaily fought game of Canterloo, was finally vanishing.

"I stake," he called. And ladling out a last glass from the punch bowl at his elbow, while the other dealt out the cards, added: "If I lose again, I must call a halt. I grieve, my good Sir Everard, but I came unprovided. Ah, for Wills, or the Cocoa Tree—and the Mall—and the Play House! Egad, if I were so fortunate as to have my life cast in St. James's, 'twould require something of mighty import to bring me to this Liverpool of ours."

"What has brought me is of import—of import, indeed!"

Sir Everard staked in his turn, and absently played his cards.

"Say you so?" The tones in which Sir Everard spoke the words had struck his partner as singular. "Ah, yes—Puckett said something about a ship in harbour. Zounds, I prophesied right; I am cleared!" He pushed the cards away. "Cleared but for this one guinea, destined to settle my shot with honest Puckett. Something about a ship," he repeated, poising the glinting coin on his thumb.

"A West Indiaman—the *Isabelle!*"

Mr. Rendall looked up sharply. Sir Everard went on listlessly running through his fingers the little pile of gold:

"Import did I say? I'd give a deal more than any winnings of a night's play to know this moment what I hope to know to-morrow from this Captain Marnock, of the *Isabelle*."

Mr. Rendall fell into a muse.

"Captain Marnock, by all that is strange!" he murmured. Then, looking up again, "And is it from Captain Marnock himself you expect to hear these news—these news of pressing import?"

Sir Everard gazed at his companion with a rising look of surprise.

"It may mean news of life or death," he said slowly; then with eagerness, "You know of this Marnock?"

"Only this, my dear sir, that if you want to make sure of having speech of the fellow it had better be to-night. The man is sick, and in no way to recovery."

Sir Everard rose to his feet.

"You know where he is—you can tell me——"

But the other made a deprecating gesture, and hastily gathered up the cards again.

"Bah, you'll spare a few minutes, I trust," he said, laughing. "Luck has brought your way one who can, if he choose, lead you within the half-hour where you want to go. That's your luck, I say, for there are but few half-hours to spare. Now, I think, I see my luck here, too."

"Pray, pray, sir——" urged Sir Everard.

"Nay, I tell you it shall be one last stroke of sport. Why, only the matter of a few minutes. Hark ye"—Rendall threw the collected pack on the table—"'tis for you to stake; that heap of goldfinches against my guidance to-night out of this warmth into the frost, to this same Marnock. Content? So then we'll *tailler* for it, to save precious time."

Impatiently Sir Everard complied; and, with a muttered oath, threw down the low card he had drawn. Mr. Rendall gave a little laugh as he showed a king; swept the coins into his pocket; and meeting his companion's glance, gaily went on:

"Nay, my dear sir, never glower at me! I am not the man to drive a bargain too far. I could, in sooth, seeing your eagerness, suggest another cut, on the same terms. But fie on the thought! What I do suggest is that you quickly put on your cloak and sally forth—ay, and not forgetting your hanger; 'tis an odd place we have to go through if you'll trust yourself to me."

So saying he himself hung his rapier back to its belt and took up his cloak.

At the door they were met by the sleepy landlord. Mr. Rendall answered the latter's amazed look of inquiry:

"'Tis even so, my good Puckett. We may be back within the hour—'twill depend on Sir Everard's business. If, however, we should not be back by the morn, inquire

for us of Captain David Marnock, in the Castle—the old Curtain Tower."

## IV

IT was a moonless night; but in the clear, frosty air stars innumerable, glinting in their winter splendour, cast from the deep sapphire sky a faint but just sufficient light into the snow-powdered street. As the two men, wrapped to the ears, threaded their way at a quick pace through the maze of mean, irregular lanes, of a sudden, at the turning of a corner, the black outline of the Castle, jagged in its already more than half-ruinous condition, rose against the deep blue, gold-patined, of the heavens. For the first time since they had started Sir Everard spoke:

"The Castle—strange! This Marnock, a mere trading captain, in the Castle? Is he in some office under Government?" Then, with a sudden new anxiety, "Nay, is not the Castle used as a prison?"

Mr. Rendall removed a fold of his cloak from his mouth to respond:

"Yes—yes, the old castle of Liverpool has been all that in its day. A place of office and a prison. But that is an old tale. For many years past it has been acquired by the town, for demolition. It's not all demolished yet, as you see. But it's coming down, they tell us; and when it does it will be none too soon. There will be a rare flight of dark birds then. The place has become a rank rookery—a sort of no-man's-land, or rather, everyman's land—and a scandal to the town. The rabble build hovels in the courtyards, pent-houses against the walls; and what takes place there no one cares to inquire too closely."

"And Marnock dwells in such a place?"

"No; there are a few still habitable chambers in the towers—our city rulers are not above raking in some rent out of the doomed pile—and it is in one of them you will find your man. A suitable nest, after all, for that kind of sea-gull—rarely on land. Quite a little stronghold, too, of its kind. High up, well out of the way of the rabblement of ditch and courtyard. You can see the tower yonder there, above the house roofs against the stars. Ah, there's a light still in the chamber."

"This sickness, by the way—what do you know of it?"

"Nothing, good sir, nothing, save that it is mysterious. Ay, and devilish inconvenient. I had a deal in the guinea trade to propose; and when I crossed over this morning from the Cheshire side, I was told, on the *Isabelle*, that the captain had not returned on board since the day of landing, when he and a passenger he had brought home—— Why, what's the matter?"

Sir Everard had given a violent start.

"A passenger?" he repeated. "What of him, in Heaven's name?"

"Oh, of the passenger I know nothing," said the young squire, resuming his way with some caution. "Of the captain himself I got mighty little good. In bed in a bad hectic, shaken with ague—half-drunk, too—a bottle by his pillow, and in a hectic! Anyhow, wholly light-headed."

"Not alone?"

The brother's mind still clung to the thought of the passenger. Julian playing the good Samaritan—here was the explanation, doubtless, of the exile's delayed return. Julian by a sick-bed. But almost as soon as risen the hope was dashed.

"An old beldam squats in the room," went on Mr. Rendall, "a mother Redcap, as we call the kind here, by way of watcher. If he's still speechless, you may yet hear what you seek from her."

The two young men now emerged from the cluster of alleys into a more open space; the whilom dry ditch of the castle, filled up and dotted with houses of miserable appearance, most of them clinging, like shells on a rock, to the partially demolished mediæval walls. The ground was strewn with huge blocks of fallen masonry, and Mr. Rendall, moving ahead, had to pick his steps with some care. He led the way through a jagged opening that had been, not without some impudence, knocked through the curtain wall for the convenience of the squatting dwellers in the doomed strong-place; they found themselves within the great baily. Shouts as of men quarrelling; a roar of song and the drum-sound of clog-dancing to the squeak of a fiddle filtered from some close den. There rose at one moment a piercing shriek, as from some woman cruelly struck. But the young squire paid no heed. He still led on gropingly to the foot of that one remaining untouched tower, where, high up, under the battlement, the fitful light showed through a loophole window.

"Faith, my dear Sir Everard, I doubt whether any other man could have been

found to-night to guide you to this place. But here we are."

Without a word, full of anxious speculation, Sir Everard followed the sound of his companion's footfalls.

"Here we are," said Rendall again, under his voice, running, as he spoke, his palms over a stout oaken door in search of the latch.

He rattled the latch, hearkened, and again rattled. At length shuffling steps were heard.

"Who are ye and what d'ye want?" came a quavering call, in broadest Lancastrian.

"Open, open, mother!" cried Rendall, imperiously. "'Tis no weather to keep gentlemen waiting on the wrong side of a door."

The door was cautiously opened, letting the light of a tallow dip send a faint yellow shaft into the Cimmerian darkness of the tower stairs, and revealing in shadowy outline the figure of a stout old woman with a red shawl cast, after the fashion of her class, over head and shoulders.

Lest she should yield to the temptation of closing the door again, Mr. Rendall thrust his foot into the opening; then pushed his way through.

"What we want is to no one's harm, least of all to you, mother. That gentleman wants a word with the captain.

The chamber in the old tower, some thirty feet in diameter, was divided by a lath wall into two uneven portions: one a narrow, curving passage, at the end of which a side opening covered by a heavily-hanging curtain of sailcloth, led into the living-room.

The two young men paused at the entrance, looking in upon the strange scene. A circular stone room, floored and ceiled with stout oak boards; sparsely plenished, and that with roughest furniture—a table, a couple of chairs, shelves with a few articles of crockery and glass, and fewer books. Sundry sea-chests were piled up against the walls, looking like so many coffins in a vault. Near the door, a pallet on the floor was evidently the watcher's improvised couch. On one side a rough fireplace had been partly excavated in the thickness of the masonry, partly built out in brickwork. Therein glowed and roared a mighty fire of driftwood, and its blaze illumined fantastically this singular dwelling—of which the most startling object was the figure on the box-bed.

The man that Sir Everard Standish had come on such a hard journey to find, lay half-propped on cushions, rolls of clothes, of blankets, and what not, his cheek resting on his closed fist, staring fixedly, as one in a trance, not at the bright burning pile, but at a spot on the oaken floor in front of the hearth. A thin, hard-featured man of naturally swart complexion, whose face, even under a beard of many days' growth, was now livid pale but for two burning red spots over the cheekbones. He lay quite and the quick, short breaths which could be heard hissing. The place was almost stiflingly hot and pervaded by an indescribable reek, odiously noisome.

Sir Everard bent to the old woman and whispered:

"He seems sick indeed, yet I must speak to him."

"No need to blow in my ear. He won't hear. Lord, he's worsened a deal to-day. He can't hear a word now. I yelled at him an hour since; he never blinked an eye. Always staring, staring! It can't last long now."

Sir Everard smothered an oath.

"There's a curse on this! All I wanted of him was—but, come, woman, you may tell." He hastily plunged his hand into his pocket, drew out a guinea, and held it before her. "Listen! A passenger that sailed home with him on his last voyage. Saw you aught of him?"

"Ay, the capt'in brought un here—chest and all, all friendly. Ay, friendly enough. But save ye, a fine gentleman like him would not stop in a pigeon cot like here. A grand gentleman he was. The next day he was gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"How should I know? The captain said he was gone away."

"Gone away!" repeated Sir Everard.

"Dearie, thank you kindly," said the old creature, snatching at the gold piece. "'Tis all I know. Gone, and the capt'in sulking as a bear. 'Tis then he began ailing—but save us, look at yon!"

A flaming log had rolled down, and leaping beyond the hearthstone, had broken itself over the wooden boards.

For a few seconds the sick man maintained his trance-like stare at the floor, as if unseeing, certainly unhearing. But all at once, as the planking began to take fire and the blue smoke to hover over the spot, a look of desperate anxiety distorted the set,

cadaverous face. He spat out a blasphemous oath, and, with a vigour astounding in one who had seemed so prostrate, bounded out of the bed, threw himself on his knees, fiercely gathered the red-hot fragments and cast them back on the hearth. Then, growling like an angry cat, he passed his hands two or three times inquiringly over the charred boards. Sir Everard now stepped up to him.

"Captain Marnock!"

The other heard him not; and it was only when he felt himself touched, somewhat imperiously on the shoulder, that he glanced up and, through the cloud of smoke, caught sight of the visitor. He gaped; then a look of dreadful fury spread over his face:

"Shiver me! Goldiemuzzle! Out again! Hell, it's all that blasted fire! Come out again, have you? Very good—no fire in future. I've put you in twice. I'll soon put you in again, never fear!"

He spoke with a laboured, whistling voice, keeping his mad eyes, white-rimmed, unblinkingly fixed on Sir Everard. A weird, revolting figure in his small clothes creased out of all shape by bed-lying, his ungartered stockings down to his heels, his shirt grey with grime and marked with wide-spreading livid stains under the right shoulder. With an effort he raised himself to his feet, and stood, swaying like a drunken man.

"Never fear!" he repeated.

With quivering lips Sir Everard tried to speak.

"Compose yourself, man. I am not what you think, whatever that may be. Listen to me. I——"

But the creature, answering not the words he could not hear, but some question put to his raving brain, cut him short:

"What have I done it for? Damn your Gold Muzzle, that's why I've done it! Gold Muzzle, don't you understand? That's why. Do you think that your Mr. Standish here, Mr. Standish there, painted on your chests, took Marnock in? That he didn't know of Gold Muzzle, Mr. Standish? Why, I had smoked you on your island. You were mighty particular at sea about shaving your muzzle—but the day the gale whisked off your wig overboard, and there shone your guinea-gold pow, I knew I had the right man. But I had a better trick than seeing you hanged at Port Royal. I had you in them hands, and kept you in them hands."

He shook blistered palms before the eyes of his horror-stricken listener.

"What have I done it for?" he repeated inanely, half fearful, half defiant. "*Museau d'Or*, who sank his French crew and was forgotten—that's why. Aha, aha! Gold Muzzle on board my ship!" The laugh came like a cough; there was no laughter in the staring eyes. "Gold Muzzle coming to England to play the gentleman! And you thought I did not smoke you? Who more respectful, more friendly than Cap'en Marnock to his passenger, Mr. Standish? Ah, and hospitable? Liverpool waterside is a rough place, honoured Mr. Standish? My room in the castle now—a safe lock up for this precious valise. And now I have got you here!"

The man's voice was growing fainter but, if possible, harsher.

"You don't like the place?" he went on. "Too late, my buck! It's man to man."

There was a pause, then, with a new drop in his voice, a mere growling now:

"Why, you lubber, you have your chance. Half the pile, fair and fair—I know it's in that valise—or Execution Dock, like Kidd. And hanging in chains. D'ye hear? You won't have it, you dog? Sword? Blast you, what's your bodkin to a good cutlass?"

With a jerk, the maniac drew an imaginary hanger from his side, and raised it high aloft; and as he did so a brilliant red patch, fast spreading, appeared on his shirt under the armpit.

"Ah would you! Hell, but what is your pin prick to what you're getting now? Take it!"

The sweep of the fancied blade, furiously dealt, threw the sick man down. He remained on his hands and knees, looking at the charred floor.

Sir Everard was standing over him, with knitted brow. Mr. Rendall, still in the doorway, looked on with intense curiosity. Presently into the silent chamber rose a kind of faint wheeze.

"There now! Got you back into it, haven't I? Right and tight. Stay there till——"

The man tried to give a pat of the palm upon the boards, but the movement threw him off his trembling balance, and he dropped with his forehead on the ground, writhing in a spasm of breathlessness. At this the young squire stepped into the room and lifted him up.

Captain Marnock's face was purple

black, his wide-opened, bloodshot eyes stared unseeingly. And by the time he had been—none too tenderly—cast back on his couch, it was clear that the limpness of death was already upon him.

## V

SIR EVERARD was as still as a statue, his gaze sombrely cast down. The young man looked at him for a moment inquiringly, and there was a new note of sympathy in his voice, as he said:

"I know not rightly what you came here to learn, but I fear me you have had your news. That passenger——"

"Ah, Heaven—my brother, sir! Found at long last, and in the same hour lost! Under there he lies," said Sir Everard; and pointed to the boards.

"Think you so, too?" said Mr. Rendall.

The two stood staring at the spot intently for a spell; then, following the same thought, cast their eyes round the room, looking for suitable implements. These were not wanting. The next moment a hatchet, a marlinspike, a wood-chopper, the slaver's own cutlass were tossed clattering on the floor. And after five minutes of feverish chopping and levering—the boards yielded, were wrenched off and cast aside. And there, in a deep cavity, between two of the huge oak beams old as the tower itself, lay the tragic thing they sought.

Sir Everard ground his teeth; the young squire, with a peremptory gesture, beckoned to the stolid old woman to draw near with the candle. Then, reverently, working in silence, like true comrades, the two men drew the poor remnant of humanity from its noisome tomb and laid it on the floor. There was a fearsome gash on the neck, and the lapse of some ten days had made terrible ravage in the dead man's face.

But as the London traveller, snatching up the candle, laid it on the floor by the pallid head and bent his own close to it, the Cheshire squire could not but mark the likeness, still notable—one that, in life, must have been marvellous—between the eager, sorrowing countenance and that other fast sinking into decay.

He could see the whole story now—the slaver captain's first mad, suspicious surmise concerning his unaccountable passenger growing into a haunting, alluring monomania, into a settled belief that fate had delivered into his power no less a person than the once renowned French buccaneer nicknamed *Museau d'Or* from his wonderful golden beard, long disappeared, all but forgotten.

Then the maniac's successful plotting—ending in the sudden fight of those two, alone up in the tower; the body temporarily concealed till it could be better disposed of but left perforce day after day, as the sickness born of the neglected, festering wound hung poisoning and the delirium of putrid fever laid its mastery over the murderer.

As for the other, there was but one thought in his brain; "Julian—Julian, dear lad!"

For a long spell, in the strange chamber uplifted over the sleeping town that seemed to evolve from the grip of the frost, there was silence. At last, looking up and speaking in a steady voice, though there was the glint of unshed tears in the corner of his eyes, the mourner said:

"Mr. Rendall, here ends your guidance. I owe you much thanks, and I will not trench further on your hours. To-night I shall keep watch over my brother's corpse."

Some time after Mr. Rendall, adjusting his cloak with care and lighting a rushlight to assist him on his downward stair journey, had taken his departure, Sir Everard turned to give some order to the old woman. He found that she had crept away, and that he was alone. Taking up the candle, he went to the stair door. It was open; he fastened it securely from within.

Once more within the room, he drove the hilt of the cutlass through one of the narrow window-panes to let some pure air into this chamber of death. And presently, on that stream of frosty cleanness, the strokes of eleven floated in from the old town hall, some two furlongs off.

And yet the hours to come until the whitening of the next day, when the constables, mustered by Mr. Rendall, ascended the tower stairs and demanded admittance, had a weirder shock in store.

It was a long vigil; a vigil of many prayers separated by deep musings over the ten years' mystery of that departed life.

The first of the small hours tolling through the broken window woke him from one of these sinkings, some words of that letter so oft read still dancing in his tired head. . . . "I have borne many names—cast off like . . ." And a new terrible thought shot like a searing bolt through his head.

What if there were some fact at the back of Marnock's ravings? "I have become very French," had written Julian.

He started to his feet, rigid. If Julian had ever grown a buccaneer's beard, it would indeed, have been gold! Julian, buccaneer! "Under the rose. It is no tale to put upon paper." Gold Muzzle! Execution Dock! He paced distractedly round the room. Zounds! What was it Marnock had raved on? "Your precious valise—half the pile fair and fair. I know it's there——"

That valise—was there a valise? Was it there? If it were, oh, heaven, and it proved true! But it could not be true. Ravings—all ravings! Nevertheless, he now, with a fury, was searching round the room. He angrily rolled the captain's helpless body from off the bed, which he probed fruitlessly. And there was Julian's sea-chest, his name still on the cover—brought in by the men to this murderous den. The chest had already been ransacked. The locks were forced—nought but clothes and such effects, which he tossed out and in again. No sign of any valise! He drew a breath of relief.

Then suddenly a vague recollection, quickly assuming a positive sharpness, made him pause; an impression of something else that lay between the beams when they had raised Julian from the recess.

He seized the candle; again knelt by the hole and peered down. Yes, there was something! He plunged his arm in; withdrew an oblong parcel—a small valise, or, rather *sacoche* of strongest leather—and tossed it on the floor by the hearth. It was elaborately secured by locks; but a long cut across the side showed that, like the chest, it had been summarily dealt with and investigated. The slashed opening had been made secure by lashings of spun yarn. And there it lay, by the side of the dead man.

In the red light of the fire, the brother gazed at it stupidly, loth to proceed. So—there was a valise, and it was in there! Gold Muzzle—Execution Dock! A Standish and Execution Dock—no, the thought was monstrous! Ah, madcap Julian! "No tale to put on paper." What tale? The tale of that *sacoche?*

Frenzy succeeded his stupor. He tugged at the knots, and as they defied him, bared his hanger, sawed at the yarn, and the gashed leather yawned. He plunged in his hand and, one by one, withdrew some half-dozen small, canvas bags which gave a sound as of rattling pebbles as he dropped them in a row on the floor. And before he had untied the mouth of the first of them, he knew already it was true. The legend of "*Museau d'Or*" the Louisiana freebooter, who had converted his fabulous wealth of ill-gotten gains into gems, and then disappeared from all ken, had reached even distant England. Mechanically he poured a handful of dazzling gems out of each into his palm and poured it back again. Wealth untold, in ruby and pearl and diamond! There they were; a thousand bright-eyed witnesses. Ah, Julian, lad!

For a long while he remained in his kneeling posture, contemplating with sombre eyes that row of accusing evidence. He rose and paced the macabre room pensively. At last, very deliberately, he picked up the bags and distributed them in his various pockets. Then, from the ample store of wood, he made up the sinking fire into a new, fierce-blazing pyre; threw into it the ripped up *sacoche*, watched it writhe and blacken, and at last—the only conceivable vindication of the dead slaver Marnock's ravings—sink into undistinguishable ashes. Stay, there was yet that imprudent letter! *Litera scripta manet!* He sought it in his pocket book; flung it on the hearth.

And then the consoling thought came upon the brother, to make bearable the remainder of his watch, that, after all, his fevered journey north, with barely an hour to spare, had been inspired, had not been in vain. "Julian, lad," be what he may have been since they had last met in life, would lie in an honoured grave.

Towards the next sundown hour, Julian Standish's coffin reverently confided, pending the morrow's funeral, in St. Nicholas' Church by the water, Sir Everard, having just parted from his friend in need, Mr. Rendall, sallied forth alone for a walk by Mersey side. When the sun had sunk beyond the Cheshire coast, as he slowly paced the solitary strand under the concealment of the rising darkness, he cast showers of gems into the turbid waters—diamonds, rubies, and pearls of untold price. And the last bag disposed of, relieved as of a millstone round his neck, strolled his way back to the Stag's Head.

# *Purely Frivolous*

## Brains and the Boy

IT is obvious, from what I have said, that no man can hope for worldly honour or advancement, who is not placed in such a relation to external circumstances as may be consentaneous to his peculiar cerebral organs; and I would advise every parent, who has the welfare of his son at heart, to procure as extensive a collection as possible of the skulls of animals, and, before determining on the choice of a profession, to compare with the utmost nicety their bumps and protuberances with those of the skull of his son. If the development of the organ of destruction point out a similarity between the youth and the tiger, let him be brought to some profession (whether that of a butcher, a soldier, or a physician, may be regulated by circumstances) in which he may be furnished with a licence to kill: as, without such licence, the indulgence of his natural propensity may lead to the untimely rescission of his vital thread, "with edge of penny cord and vile reproach." If he show an analogy with the jackal, let all possible influence be used to procure him a place at court, where he will infallibly thrive. If his skull bear a marked resemblance to that of a magpie, it cannot be doubted that he will prove an admirable lawyer; and if with this advantageous conformation be combined any similitude to that of an owl, very confident hopes may be formed of his becoming a judge. Thomas Love Peacock.

DESCEND, ye Nine! Descend and sing!
Without your best assistance
I can't so much as name this thing
That's come into existence.
Descend, Urania! Descend,
Melpomene and Clio!
Pronounce this word-without-an-end
Pronounce Philosemeio—— . . .

Ah! cruel, cruel! Foiled again,
When I'd all but succeeded!
Can any mortal lungs contain
One half the breath that's needed?
If Muses, Gods, and devil too,
Can get it no correcter,
I think 'twould be as well—don't you?—
To stick to "Stamp-collector."

G. K. Menzies.

## A Rousing Speech

IF you waste your money i' summer, you can't expect to have it to spend i' winter, and then wot comes of your 'unting?—ay, then wot comes of my 'ounds? That's the question put in a familiar form. (Cheers.) Ah, now I see you twig, and go along with me. Oh, gen'lemen, gen'lemen, there's nothin' so difficult as gettin' a subscription to a pack of 'ounds. Chaps that would give a 'undred a year to a cuk, grudge a fi'-pun note to a pack that would keep them in 'ealth, and save them all the money i' seidlitz pooders. (Laughter and applause.) Which, then, will you have. 'Unting i' winter, or street-strollin i' summer? I'll divide the meetin' on the question, and take the sense of this assembly. All, then, who are for the sport of kings, the image of war without its guilt, with only five-and-twenty per cent. of its danger, 'old up their 'ands. Robert S. Surtees.

## Warp and Woof

FOR proof of the use which poetry makes of the weaver's dictionary, *vide* ten thousand odes on spring; where you may catch the fragrance of the *damask* rose, listen to the rustling of the *silken* foliage, or lie extended with a listless languor, pillowing your head upon the *velvet* mead; to say nothing of Nature's *loom*, which is set to work regularly on the 1st of May, to weave variegated *carpets* for the lawns and landscapes. Now these similitudes, though very pretty and very apropos, I own I am not perfectly satisfied with. The Genoese certainly excel us in the article of velvets; and French silks are by many people far preferred for elegance to any of English manufacture. I appeal then to you if these allusions would not be much more delightful to British ears if they tended to promote such manufactures as are more peculiarly our own . . . Surely we have a variety which would suit all subjects and all descriptions; nor do I despair, if this letter has the desired effect, but I shall presently see landscapes beautifully diversified with (all due deference being paid to alliteration) plains of *plush*, pastures of *poplin*, downs of *dimity*, valleys of *velveret*, and meadows of *Manchester*. How gloriously novel this would be; how patriotically poetical an innovation, which nothing but bigoted prejudice could object to, nothing but disaffection to the interests of the country could disapprove. John Hookham Frere.

UNCLE SIMON he
Clum up a tree
To see what he could see
When presentlee
Uncle Jim
Clum up beside of him
And squatted down by he.

Charles Farrar Browne.

## A Case of Trigamy

GOING to marry her! impossible; you mean a part of her. He could not marry all of her himself. It would not be a case of bigamy, but of trigamy. The neighbourhood or the magistrate should interfere. There is enough of her to furnish wives for the whole parish. One man marry her! it is monstrous! you might people a colony with her, or, perhaps, take your morning's walk around her, always providing that there were frequent resting places, and you were in rude health. I once was rash enough to walk round her before breakfast, but only got half way and gave it up exhausted. Or you might read the Riot Act, and disperse her; in short you might do any thing but marry her. Sydney Smith.

## What Became of Her?

SO she went into the garden to cut a cabbage leaf, to make an apple pie; and at the same time a great she-bear coming up the street pops its head into the shop. "What! No soap!" So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber; and there were present the Picaninnies, and the Joblillies, and the Garyulies, and the grand Panjandrum himself, with the little round button at top; and they all fell to playing the game of catch-as-catch-can, till the gunpowder ran out at the heels of their boots. Samuel Foote.

*Acknowledgments—To author and publisher for permission to quote from "Provincial Sketches," by G. K. Menzies (Alexander Gardner).*

# Them Others

*Of an unofficial peace gesture*

## By STACY AUMONIER

IT is always disturbing to me when things fall into pattern form, when, in fact, incidents of real life dovetail with each other in such a manner as to suggest the shape of a story. A story is a nice, neat little thing with what is called a " working-up " and a climax, and life is a clumsy, ungraspable thing, very incomplete in its periods, and with a poor sense of climax. In fact, death—which is a very uncertain quantity—is the only definite note it strikes, and even death has an uncomfortable way of setting other things in motion. If, therefore, in telling you about my friend Mrs. Ward, I am driven to the usual shifts of the story-teller, you must believe me that it is because this narrative concerns visions : Mrs. Ward's visions, my visions, and your visions. Consequently I am dependent upon my own poor powers of transcription to mould these visions into some sort of shape, and am driven into the position of a story-teller against my will.

The first vision, then, concerns the back view of the Sheldrake Road, which, as you know, butts on to the railway embankment near Dalston Junction station. If you are of an adventurous turn of mind you shall accompany me, and we will creep up on to the embankment together and look down into these back-yards. (We shall be liable to a fine of 40s., according to a bye-law of the railway company, for doing so, but the experience will justify us.)

There are twenty-two of these small buff-brick houses huddled together in this road, and there is surely no more certain way of judging not only the character of the individual inhabitants, but of their mode of life, than by a survey of these somewhat pathetic yards. Is it not for instance, easy to determine the timid, well-ordered mind of little Miss Porson, the dressmaker at number nine, by its garden of neat mud paths, with its thin patch of meagre grass, and the small bed of skimpy geraniums ? Cannot one read the tragedy of those dreadful Alleson people at number four ? The garden is a wilderness of filth and broken bottles, where even the weeds seem chary of establishing themselves. In fact, if we listen carefully—and the trains are not making too much noise—we can hear the shrill crescendo of Mrs. Alleson's voice cursing at her husband in the kitchen, the half-empty gin-bottle between them.

The methodical pushfulness and practicability of young Mr. and Mrs. Andrew MacFarlane is evident at number fourteen. They have actually grown a patch of potatoes and some scarlet-runners, and there is a small chicken-run near the house.

Those irresponsible people, the O'Neals, have grown a bed of hollyhocks, but for the rest the garden is untidy and unkempt. One could almost swear they were connected in some obscure way with the theatrical profession.

Mrs. Abbot's garden is a sort of playground. It has asphalt paths, always swarming with small and not too clean children, and there are five lines of washing suspended above the mud. Every day seems to be Mrs. Abbot's washing-day. Perhaps she " does " for others. Sam Abbot is certainly a lazy, insolent old rascal, and such always seem destined to be richly fertile. Mrs. Abbot is a pleasant " body," though.

The Greens are the swells of the road. George Green is in the grocery line, and both his sons are earning good money, and one daughter has piano lessons. The narrow strip of yard is actually divided into two sections, a flower-garden and a kitchen-garden. And they are the only people who have flower-boxes in the front.

Number eight is a curious place. Old Mr. Bilge lives there. He spends most of his time in the garden, but nothing ever seems to come up. He stands about in his shirt-sleeves, and with a circular paper-hat

on his head, like a printer. They say he was formerly a corn merchant, but has lost all his money. He keeps the garden very neat and tidy, but nothing seems to grow. He stands there, staring at the beds, as though he found their barrenness quite unaccountable.

Number eleven is unoccupied, and number twelve is Mrs. Ward's.

We now come to an important vision, and I want you to come down with me from the embankment and to view Mrs. Ward's garden from inside, and also Mrs. Ward as I saw her on that evening when I had occasion to pay my first visit.

It had been raining, but the sun had come out. We wandered round the paths together, and I can see her old face now, lined and seamed with years of anxious toil and struggle; her long, bony arms, slightly withered, but moving restlessly in the direction of snails and slugs.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she was saying. "What with the dogs and the cats, and the snails, and the trains, it's wonderful anything comes up at all!"

Mrs. Ward's garden has a character of its own, and I cannot account for it. There is nothing very special growing—a few pansies and a narrow border of London pride, several clumps of unrecognisable things that haven't flowered, the grass patch in only fair order, and at the end of the garden an unfinished rabbit-hutch. But there is about Mrs. Ward's garden an atmosphere. There is something about it that reflects her placid eye, the calm, somewhat contemplative way she has of looking right through things, as though they didn't concern her too closely. As though, in fact, she were too occupied with her inner visions.

"No," she says in answer to my query, "we don't mind the trains at all. In fact, me and my Tom, we often come out here and sit after supper. And Tom smokes his pipe. We like to hear the trains go by."

She gazes abstractedly at the embankment.

"I like to hear things . . . going on and that. It's Dalston Junction a little farther on. The trains go from there to all parts, right out into the country they do—ever so far . . . My Ernie went from Dalston."

She adds the last in a changed tone of voice. And now perhaps we come to the most important vision of all—Mrs. Ward's vision of "My Ernie."

I ought perhaps to mention that I had never met "my Ernie." I can only see him through Mrs. Ward's eyes. At the time when I met her, he had been away at the war for nearly a year. I need hardly say that "my Ernie" was a paragon of sons. He was brilliant, handsome, and incredibly clever. Everything that "my Ernie" said was treasured. Every opinion that he expressed stood. If "my Ernie" liked anyone, that person was always a welcome guest. If "my Ernie" disliked anyone they were not to be tolerated, however plausible they might appear.

I had seen Ernie's photograph, and I must confess that he appeared a rather weak, extremely ordinary-looking young man, but then I would rather trust to Mrs. Ward's visions than the art of any photographer.

Tom Ward was a mild, ineffectual-looking old man, with something of Mrs. Ward's placidity but with nothing of her strong individual poise. He had some job in a gasworks. There was also a daughter named Lily, a brilliant person who served in a tea-shop, and sometimes went to theatres with young men. To both husband and daughter Mrs. Ward adopted an affectionate, mothering, almost pitying attitude. But with "my Ernie" it was quite a different thing. I can see her stooping figure, and her silver-white hair gleaming in the sun as we come to the unfinished rabbit-hutch, and the curious wistful tones of her voice as she touches it and says:

"When my Ernie comes home——"

The war to her was some unimaginable but disconcerting affair centred round Ernie. People seemed to have got into some desperate trouble, and Ernie was the only one capable of getting them out of it. And I could not at that time gauge how much Mrs. Ward realised the dangers the boy was experiencing. She always spoke with conviction that he would return safely. Nearly every other sentence contained some reference to things that were to happen "when my Ernie comes home." What doubts and fears she had were only recognisable by the subtlest shades in her voice.

When we looked over the wall into the deserted garden next door, she said:

"Oh, dear! I'm afraid they'll never let that place. It's been empty since the Stellings went away. Oh, years ago, before this old war."

II

IT was on the occasion of my second visit that Mrs. Ward told me more about the Stellings. It appeared that they were a German family, of all things! There was a Mr. Stelling, and a Mrs. Frow Stelling, and two boys.

Mr. Stelling was a watchmaker, and he came from a place called Bremen. It was a very sad story Mrs. Ward told me. They had only been over here for ten months when Mr. Stelling died, and Mrs. Frow Stelling and the boys went back to Germany.

During the time of the Stellings' sojourn in the Sheldrake Road it appears that the Wards had seen quite a good deal of them, and though it would be an exaggeration to say that they ever became great friends, they certainly got through that period without any unpleasantness, and even developed a certain degree of intimacy.

"Allowing for their being foreigners," Mrs. Ward explained, "they were quite pleasant people."

On one or two occasions they invited each other to supper, and I wish my visions were sufficiently clear to envisage those two families indulging this social habit.

According to Mrs. Ward, Mr. Stelling was a kind little man with a round, fat face. He spoke English fluently, but Mrs. Ward objected to his table manners.

"When my Tom eats," she said, "you don't hear a sound—I look after that! But that Mr. Stelling—Oh, dear!"

The trouble with Mrs. Stelling was that she could only speak a few words of English, but Mrs. Ward said "she was a pleasant enough little body," and she established herself quite definitely in Mrs. Ward's affections for the reason that she was so obviously and so passionately devoted to her two sons.

"Oh, my word, though, they do have funny ways—these foreigners," she continued. "The things they used to eat! Most peculiar! I've known them eat stewed prunes with hot meat!"

Mrs. Ward repeated, "Stewed prunes with hot meat!" several times, and shook her head, as though this exotic mixture was a thing to be sternly discouraged. But she acknowledged that Mrs. Frow Stelling was in some ways a very good cook; in fact, her cakes were really wonderful, "the sort of thing you can't ever buy in a shop."

About the boys there seemed to be a little divergence of opinion. They were both also fat-faced, and their heads were "almost shaved like convicts." The elder one wore spectacles and was rather noisy, but:

"My Ernie liked the younger one. Oh, yes, my Ernie said that young Hans was quite a nice boy. It was funny the way they spoke, funny and difficult to understand."

It was very patent that between the elder boy and Ernie, who were of about the same age, there was an element of rivalry which was perhaps more accentuated in the attitude of the mothers than in the boys themselves. Mrs. Ward could find little virtue in this elder boy. Most of her criticism of the family was levelled against him. The rest she found only a little peculiar. She said she had never heard such a funny Christian name as Frow. Florrie she had heard of, and even Flora, but not *Frow*. I suggested that perhaps Frow might be some sort of title, but she shook her head and said that that was what she was always known as in the Sheldrake Road, "Mrs. Frow Stelling."

In spite of Mrs. Ward's lack of opportunity for greater intimacy on account of the language problem, her own fine imaginative qualities helped her a great deal. And in one particular she seemed curiously vivid. She gathered an account from one of them—I'm not sure whether it was Mr. or Mrs. Frow Stelling or one of the boys—of a place they described near their home in Bremen. There was a narrow street of high buildings by a canal, and a little bridge that led over into a gentleman's park. At a point where the canal turned sharply eastwards there was a clump of linden-trees, where one could go in the summer-time, and under their shade one might sit and drink light beer and listen to a band that played in the early part of the evening.

Mrs. Ward was curiously clear about that. She said she often thought about Mr. Stelling sitting there after his day's work. It must have been very pleasant for him, and he seemed to miss this luxury in Dalston more than anything. Once Ernie, in a friendly mood, had taken him into the four-ale bar of the "The Unicorn," at the corner of the Sheldrake Road, but Mr. Stelling did not seem happy. Ernie acknowledged afterwards that it had been an unfortunate evening. The bar had been

rather crowded, and there was a man and two women who had all been drinking too much. In any case, Mr. Stelling had been obviously restless there, and he had said afterwards:

"It is not that one wishes to drink only——"

And he had shaken his fat little head, and had never been known to visit "The Unicorn" again.

Mr. Stelling died quite suddenly of some heart trouble, and Mrs. Ward could not get it out of her head that his last illness was brought about by his disappointment and grief in not being able to go and sit quietly under the linden-trees after his day's work and listen to a band.

When poor Mr. Stelling died, Mrs. Frow Stelling was heartbroken, and I have reason to believe that Mrs. Ward went in and wept with her, and in their dumb way they forged the chains of some desperate understanding. When Mrs. Frow Stelling went back to Germany they promised to write to each other. But they never did, and for a very good reason. As Mrs. Ward said, she was "no scollard," and as for Mrs. Frow Stelling, her English was such a doubtful quantity, she probably never got beyond addressing the envelope.

"That was three years ago," said Mrs. Ward. "Them boys must be eighteen and nineteen now."

## III

IF I have intruded too greatly into the intimacy of Mrs. Ward's life, one of my excuses must be — not that I am "a scholard," but that I am in any case able to read a simple English letter. I was, in fact, on several occasions "requisitioned." When Lily was not at home, someone had to read Ernie's letters out loud. The arrival of Ernie's letters was always an inspiring experience. I should perhaps be in the garden with Mrs. Ward, when Tom would come hurrying out to the back, and call out:

"Mother! a letter from Ernie!"

And then there would be such excitement and commotion. The first thing was always the hunt for Mrs. Ward's spectacles. They were never where she had put them. Tom would keep on turning the letter over in his hands, and he would reiterate:

"Well, what did you do with them, mother?"

At length they would be found in some unlikely place, and she would take the letter tremblingly to the light. I never knew quite how much Mrs. Ward could read. She could certainly read a certain amount. I saw her old eyes sparkling and her tongue moving jerkily between her parted lips, as though she were formulating the words she read, and she would keep on repeating:

"T'ch! T'ch! Oh, dear, oh, dear, the *things* he says!"

And Tom, impatiently by the door, would say:

"Well, what *does* he say?"

She never attempted to read the letter out loud, but at last she would wipe her spectacles and say:

"Oh, you read it, sir. The *things* he says!"

They were indeed very good letters of Ernie's, written apparently in the highest spirits. There was never a grumble, not a word. One might gather that he was away with a lot of young bloods on some sporting expedition, in which football, rags, sing-songs, and strange feeds played a conspicuous part. I read a good many of Ernie's letters, and I do not remember that he ever made a single reference to the horrors of war, or said anything about his own personal discomforts. The boy must have had something of his mother in him, in spite of the photograph.

And between the kitchen and the yard Mrs. Ward would spend her day placidly content, for Ernie never failed to write. There was sometimes a lapse of a few days, but the letter seldom failed to come every fortnight.

It would be difficult to know what Mrs. Ward's actual conception of the war was. She never read the newspapers, for the reason, as she explained, that "there was nothing in them these days except about this old war." She occasionally dived into *Reynolds's Newspaper* on Sundays to see if there were any interesting law cases or any news of a romantic character. There was nothing romantic in the war news. It was all preposterous. She did indeed read the papers for the first few weeks, but this was for the reason that she had some vague idea that they might contain some account of Ernie's doings. But as they did not, she dismissed them with contempt.

But I found her one night in a peculiarly preoccupied mood. She was out in the garden, and she kept staring abstractedly over the fence into the unoccupied ground

next door. It appeared that it dawned upon her that the war was to do with "these Germans," that, in fact, we were fighting the Germans, and then she thought of the Stellings. Those boys would now be about eighteen and nineteen. They would be fighting, too. They would be fighting against Ernie. This seemed very peculiar.

"Of course," she said, "I never took to that elder boy—a greedy, rough sort of boy he was. But I'm sure my Ernie wouldn't hurt young Hans."

She meditated for a moment as though she were contemplating what particular action Ernie would take in the matter. She knew he didn't like the elder boy, but she doubted whether he would want to do anything very violent to him.

"They went out to a music-hall one night together," she explained, as though a friendship cemented in this luxurious fashion could hardly be broken by an unreasonable display of passion.

## IV

IT was a few weeks later that the terror suddenly crept into Mrs. Ward's life. Ernie's letters ceased abruptly. The fortnight passed, then three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, and not a word. I don't think that Mrs. Ward's character at any time stood out so vividly as during those weeks of stress. It is true she appeared a little feebler, and she trembled in her movements, whilst her eyes seemed abstracted as though all the power in them were concentrated in her ears, alert for the bell or the knock. She started visibly at odd moments, and her imagination was always carrying her tempestuously to the front door only to answer—a milkman or a casual hawker. But she never expressed her fear in words. When Tom came home—he seemed to have aged rapidly—he would come bustling out into the garden and cry out tremblingly:

"There ain't been no letter to-day, mother?"

And she would say quite placidly:

"No, not to-day, Tom. It'll come to-morrow I expect."

And she would rally him and talk of little things, and get busy with his supper. And in the garden I would try and talk to her about her clump of pansies, and the latest yarn about her neighbours, and I tried to get between her and the rabbit-hutch with its dumb appeal of incompletion. And I would notice her staring curiously over into the empty garden next door, as though she were being assailed by some disturbing apprehensions. Ernie would not hurt that eldest boy—but suppose—if things were reversed—there was something inexplicable and terrible lurking in this passive silence.

During this period, the old man was suddenly taken very ill. He came home one night with a high temperature and developed pneumonia. He was laid up for many weeks, and she kept back the telegram that came while he was almost unconscious, and she tended him night and day, nursing her own anguish with a calm face.

For the telegram told her that her Ernie was "missing and believed wounded."

I do not know at what period she told the father this news, but it was certainly not till he was convalescent. And the old man seemed to sink into a kind of apathy.

And then the winter came on, and the gardens were bleak in the Sheldrake Road. And Lily ran away and married a young tobacconist, who was earning twenty-five shillings a week. And old Tom was dismissed from the gasworks. His work was not proving satisfactory. And he sat about at home and moped. And in the meantime the price of foodstuffs was going up, and coals were a luxury. And so in the early morning Mrs. Ward would go off and work for Mrs. Abbot at the wash-tub, and she would earn eight or twelve shillings a week.

It is difficult to know how they managed during those days, but one could see that Mrs. Ward was buoyed up by some poignant hope. She would not give way. Eventually old Tom did get some work to do at a stationer's.

My next vision of Mrs. Ward concerns a certain winter evening. I could not see inside the kitchen, but the old man could be heard complaining. His querulous voice was rambling on, and Mrs. Ward was standing by the door leading into the garden. She had returned from her day's work and was scraping a pan out into a bin near the door. A train shrieked by, and the wind was blowing a fine rain against the house. Suddenly she stood up and looked up at the sky; then she pushed back her hair from her brow and frowned at the dark house next door. Then she said:

"Oh, I don't know, Tom, if we've got to do it, we *must* do it. If them others can

stand it, we can stand it. Whatever them others can do, we can do."

And then my visions jump rather wildly. And the war becomes to me epitomised in two women. One in this dim doorway in our obscure suburb of Dalston, scraping out a pan, and the other perhaps in some dark, high house near a canal on the outskirts of Bremen. Them others! These two women silently enduring. And the trains rushing by, and all the dark, mysterious forces of the night operating on them equivocally.

Poor Mrs. Frow Stelling! Perhaps those boys of hers are "missing, believed killed." Perhaps they are killed for certain. She is as much outside "the things going on" as Mrs. Ward. Perhaps she is equally as patient, as brave.

And Mrs. Ward enters the kitchen, and her eyes are blazing with a strange light as she says:

"We'll hear to-morrow, Tom. And if we don't hear to-morrow, we'll hear the next day. And if we don't hear the next day, we'll hear the day after. And if we don't—if we don't never hear—again—if them others can stand it, we can stand it, I say."

And then her voice breaks, and she cries a little, for endurance has its limitations, and—the work is hard at Mrs. Abbot's.

## V

AND the months go by, and she stoops a little more as she walks, and—someone has thrown a cloth over the rabbit-hutch with its unfinished roof. And Mrs. Ward is curiously retrospective. It is useless to tell her of the things of the active world. She listens politely but she does not hear. She is full of reminiscences of Ernie's and Lily's childhood. She recounts again and again the story of how Ernie when he was a little boy ordered five tons of coal from a coal merchant to be sent to a girls' school in Dalston High Road. She describes the coal carts arriving in the morning, and the consternation and annoyance of the headmistress.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she says; "the things he did!"

She does not talk much of the Stellings, but one day she says meditatively:

"Mrs. Frow Stelling thought a lot of that boy Hans. So she did of the other, so far as that goes. It's only natural like, I suppose."

As time went on Tom Ward lost all hope. He said he was convinced that the boy was killed. Having arrived at this conclusion, he seemed to become more composed. He gradually began to accustom himself to the new point of view. But with Mrs. Ward the exact opposite was the case.

She was more than ever convinced that the boy was alive, but she suffered terribly.

There came a time—it was in early April—when one felt that the strain could not last. She seemed to lose all interest in the passing world and lived entirely within herself. Even the arrival of Lily's baby did not rouse her. She looked at the child queerly, as though she doubted whether any useful or happy purpose was served by its appearance.

In spite of her averred optimism she lost her tremulous sense of apprehension when the bell went or the front door was tapped. She let the milkman—even the postman—wait.

When she spoke it was invariably of things that happened years ago.

Sometimes she talked about the Stellings, and on one Sunday she made a strange pilgrimage out to Finchley and visited Mr. Stelling's grave. I don't know what she did there, but she returned looking very exhausted and unwell. As a matter of fact, she was unwell for some days after this visit.

I now come to my most unforgetable vision of Mrs. Ward.

It was a day at the end of April, and warm for the time of year. I was standing in the garden with her, and it was nearly dark. A goods train had been shunting, and making a great deal of noise in front of the house, and at last had disappeared. I had not been able to help noticing that Mrs. Ward's garden was curiously neglected for her for the time of year. The grass was growing on the paths, and the snails had left their silver trail over all the fences.

I was telling her a rumour I had heard about the railway porter and his wife at number twenty-three, and she seemed fairly interested, for she had known John Hemsley, the porter, fifteen years ago, when Ernie was a baby. There were two old broken Windsor chairs out in the garden, and on one was a zinc basin in which were some potatoes. She was peeling them, as Lily and her husband were coming to supper. By the kitchen door was a small sink. When

she had finished the potatoes she stood up and began to pour the water down the sink, taking care not to let the skins go, too. I was noticing her old bent back, and her long, bony hands gripping the sides of the basin, when suddenly a figure came limping round the bend of the house from the side passage, and two arms were thrown round her waist, and a voice said :

" Mind them skins don't go down the sink, mother. They'll stop it up ! "

## VI

AS I explained to Ernie afterwards, it was an extremely foolish thing to do. If his mother had had anything wrong with her heart, it might have been very serious. There had been many cases of people dying from the shock of such an experience.

As it was, she merely dropped the basin and stood there trembling like a leaf, and Ernie laughed loud and uproariously. It must have been three or four minutes before she could regain her speech, and then all she could manage to say was :

" Ernie ! . . . My Ernie ! "

And the boy laughed and ragged his mother, and pulled her into the house, and Tom appeared and stared at his son, and said feebly :

" Well, I never ! "

I don't know how it was that I found myself intruding upon the sanctity of the inner life of the Ward family that evening. I had never had a meal there before, but I felt that I was holding a sort of watching brief over the soul and body of Mrs. Ward. I had had a little medical training in my early youth, and this may have been one of the reasons which prompted me to stay.

When Lily and her husband appeared, we sat down to a meal of mashed potatoes and onions stewed in milk, with bread and cheese, and very excellent it was.

Lily and her husband took the whole thing in a boisterous, high comedy manner that fitted in with the mood of Ernie. Old Tom sat there staring at his son, and repeating at intervals :

" Well, I never ! "

And Mrs. Ward hovered round the boy's plate. Her eyes divided their time between his plate and his face, and she hardly spoke all the evening.

Ernie's story was remarkable enough. He told it disconnectedly and incoherently. Also there were moments when he rambled in a rather peculiar way, and sometimes he stammered, and seemed unable to frame a sentence. Lily's husband went out to fetch some beer to celebrate the joyful occasion, and Ernie drank his in little sips, and spluttered. The boy must have suffered considerably, and he had a wound in the abdomen, and another in the right forearm which for a time had paralysed him.

As far as I could gather, his story was this :

He and a platoon of men had been ambushed and had had to surrender. When being sent back to a base, three of them tried to escape from the train, which had been held up at night. He did not know what had happened to the other two men, but it was on this occasion that he received his abdominal wound at the hands of a guard.

He had then been sent to some infirmary, where he was fairly well treated, but as soon as his wound had healed a little, he had been suddenly sent to some fortress prison, presumably as a punishment. He hadn't the faintest idea how long he had been confined there. He said it seemed like fifteen years. It was probably nine months. He had solitary confinement in a cell, which was like a small lavatory. He had fifteen minutes' exercise every day in a yard with some other prisoners, who were Russians, he thought. He spoke to no one. He used to sing and recite in his cell, and there were times when he was quite convinced that he was " off his chump." He said he had lost " all sense of everything " when he was suddenly transferred to another prison. Here the conditions were somewhat better and he was made to work. He said he wrote six or seven letters home from there, but received no reply. The letters certainly never reached Dalston. The food was execrable, but a big improvement on the dungeon. He was only there a few weeks when he and some thirty other prisoners were sent suddenly to work on the land at a kind of settlement. He said that the life there would have been tolerable if it hadn't been for the fact that the commandant was an absolute brute.

It was here, however, that he met a sailor named Martin, a Royal Naval reservist, an elderly, thick-set man with a black beard and only one eye. Ernie said that Martin " was an artist. He wangled everything

He possessed a genius for getting what he wanted. He would get a beef-steak out of a stone." In fact, it was obvious that the whole of Ernie's narrative was coloured by his vision of Martin. He said he'd never met such a chap in his life. He admired him enormously, and he was also a little afraid of him.

By some miraculous means peculiar to sailors, Martin acquired a compass. Ernie hardly knew what a compass was, but the sailor explained to him that it was all that was necessary to take you straight to England. Ernie said he " had had enough of escaping. It didn't agree with his health," but so strong was his faith and belief in Martin that he ultimately agreed to try with him.

He said Martin's method of escape was the coolest thing he'd ever seen. He planned it all beforehand. It was the fag-end of the day, and the whistle had gone and the prisoners were trooping back across a potato-field. Martin and Ernie were very slow. They lingered apparently to discuss some matter connected with the soil. There were two sentries in sight, one near them, and the other perhaps a hundred yards away. The potato-field was on a slope and at the bottom of the field were two lines of barbed-wire entanglements. The other prisoners passed out of sight, and the sentry near them called out something, probably telling them to hurry up. They started to go up the field when suddenly Martin staggered and clutched his throat. Then he fell over backwards and commenced to have an epileptic fit. Ernie said it was the realest thing he'd ever seen. The sentry ran up, at the same time whistling to his comrade. Ernie released Martin's collar-band and tried to help him. Both the sentries approached and Ernie stood back. He saw them bending over the prostrate man, when suddenly a most extraordinary thing happened. Both their heads were brought together with fearful violence. One fell completely senseless, but the other staggered forward and groped for his rifle.

When Ernie told this part of the story he kept dabbing his forehead with his handkerchief.

" I had never seen such a man as Martin, I don't think," he said. Lord ! He had a fist like a leg of mutton. He laid 'em out neatly on the grass, took off their coats and most of their other clothes, and flung 'em over the barbed wire, and then swarmed over like a cat. I had more difficulty, but he got me across too, somehow. Then we carted the clothes away to the next line.

" We got up into a wood that night, and Martin draws out his compass and he says : ' We've got a hundred and seven miles to do in night shifts, cully. And if we make a slip we're shot as safe as knife.' It sounded the maddest scheme in the world, but I somehow felt that Martin would get through it. The only thing that saved me was that —that I didn't have to think. I simply left everything to him. If I'd started thinking I should have gone mad. I had it fixed in my mind, ' either he does it or he doesn't do it. I can't help it.' I reely don't remember much about that journey. It was all a dream like. We did all our travellin' at night, by compass, and hid by day. Neither of us had a word of German. But—Gawd's truth !—that man Martin was a marvel ! He turned our trousers inside out and made 'em look like ordinary labourers' trousers. He disappeared the first night and came back with some other old clothes. We lived mostly on raw potatoes we dug out of the ground with our hands, but not always. One night he came back with a fowl, which he cooked in a hole in the earth, making a fire with a flint and some dry stuff he pinched from a farm. I believe Martin could have stole an egg from under a hen without her noticing it. He was the coolest card there ever was. Of course there was a lot of trouble one way and another. It wasn't always easy to find wooded country or protection of any sort. We often ran into people, and they stared at us, and we shifted our course. But I think we were only addressed three or four times by men, and then Martin's methods were the simplest in the world. He just looked sort of blank for a moment and then knocked them clean out and bolted. Of course, they were after us all the time, and it was this constant tacking and shifting ground that took so long. Fancy ! he never had a map, you know, nothing but the compass. We didn't know what sort of country we were coming to, nothing. We just crept through the night like cats. I believe Martin could see in the dark . . . He killed a dog one night with his hands . . . It was necessary."

It was impossible to discover from Ernie how long this amazing journey lasted—the best part of two months, I believe. He

was himself a little uncertain with regard to many incidents, whether they were true or whether they were hallucinations. He suffered greatly from his wound and had periods of feverishness. But one morning, he said, Martin began " prancing." He seemed to develop some curious sense that they were near the Dutch frontier. And then, according to Ernie, " a cat wasn't in it with Martin."

He was very mysterious about the actual crossing. I gathered that there had been some " clumsy " work with sentries. It was at that time that Ernie got a bullet through his arm. When he got to Holland he was very ill. It was not that the wound was a very serious one, but, as he explained :

" Me blood was in a bad state. I was nearly down and out."

He was very kindly treated by some Dutch Sisters in a convent hospital. But he was delirious for a long time, and when he became more normal they wanted to communicate with his people in England, but this didn't appeal to the dramatic sense of Ernie.

" I thought I'd spring a surprise packet on you," he said, grinning.

We asked about Martin, but Ernie said he never saw him again. He went away while Ernie was delirious, and they said he had gone to Rotterdam to take ship somewhere. He thought Holland was a dull place.

## VII

DURING the relation of this narrative my attention was divided between watching the face of Ernie and the face of Ernie's mother.

I am quite convinced that she did not listen to the story at all. She never took her eyes from his face, and although her tongue was following the flow of his remarks, her mind was occupied with the vision of Ernie when he was a little boy and when he ordered five tons of coal to be sent to the girls' school.

When he had finished she said :

" Did you meet either of them young Stellings ? "

And Ernie laughed rather uproariously and said no, he didn't have the pleasure of renewing their acquaintance.

On his way home, it appeared, he had presented himself at headquarters, and after a medical examination had received his discharge.

" So now you'll be able to finish the rabbit-hutch," said Lily's husband, and we all laughed again, with the exception of Mrs. Ward.

I found her later standing alone in the garden. It was a warm spring night. There was no moon, but the sky appeared restless with its burden of trembling stars. She had an old shawl drawn round her shoulders, and she stood there very silently, with her arms crossed.

" Well, this is splendid news, Mrs. Ward," I said.

She started a little, and coughed, and pulled the shawl closer.

She said, " Yes, sir," very faintly.

I don't think she was very conscious of me. She still appeared immersed in the contemplation of her inner visions. Her eyes settled upon the empty house next door, and I thought I detected the trail of a tear glistening on her cheeks. I lighted my pipe. We could hear Ernie, and Lily, and Lily's husband still laughing and talking inside.

" She used to make a very good puddin'," Mrs. Ward said suddenly at random. " Dried fruit inside, and that. My Ernie liked it very much . . ."

It was quite true. On either side of her cheek a tear had trickled. She was trembling a little, worn out by the emotions of the evening.

There was a moment of silence, unusual for Dalston.

" It's all very . . . perplexin' and that," she said quietly.

And then I knew for certain that in that great hour of her happiness her mind was assailed by strange and tremulous doubts. She was thinking of " them others " a little wistfully. She was doubting whether one could rejoice—when the thing became clear and actual to one—without sending out one's thoughts into the dark garden to " them others " who were suffering too. And she had come out into this little meagre yard at Dalston and gazed through the mist and smoke upwards to the stars, because she wanted peace intensely, and so she sought it within herself, because she knew that real peace is a thing which concerns the heart alone.

And so I left her standing there, and I went my way, for I knew that she was wiser than I.

# A Grand Slam

*A man who awaited the gift of chance*

By LEONID ANDREYEV

**Among more recent Russian short story writers, there has hardly been a greater master of grim irony than Leonid Andreyev. In some moods he has been compared with Poe. This intensely dramatic tale shows him in a characteristic and very human vein. Andreyev died in 1919.**

THEY played *vint** three times a week—on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Sunday would have been a very convenient day to play, but Sunday had to be kept open for all kinds of accidents, such as a casual caller or a theatre, and was thus considered the dullest day in the whole week. However, when in the country during the summer they played on Sundays too. The partnerships were arranged in this way: portly, irritable Maslenikov played with Jacov Ivanovitch, while Evpraksia Vasilievna played with her solemn brother, Prokopy Vasilievitch. The arrangement had been made six years before, and Evpraksia Vasilievna always insisted on its observance. Playing against her brother presented not the remotest interest either for her or for him, since the winnings of one would have meant the losses of the other, and though from a gambling point of view the play was insignificant, and neither of them was in need of money, still, she could not understand the pleasure of playing for the sake of the game alone, and was always delighted when she won. The money she won at cards was always kept separately in a money-box and it seemed more precious and important to her than the big notes with which she paid for their expensive flat and for housekeeping.

They all met at Prokopy Vasilievitch's, for there was only himself and his sister in their big flat (not mentioning the big white tom-cat, who was always asleep in an armchair); and they thus made sure of the quietness essential to their occupation. Evpraksia Vasilievna's brother was a widower. He had lost his wife in the second year of their marriage, and spent two months in a mental nursing home after her death. Evpraksia Vasilievna herself was not married, though she had once been in love with a student. No one knew, and it seemed that she herself had forgotten, why it was that she had never married her student, but every year when the usual appeal was made on behalf of poor students she sent to the committee a carefully folded hundred-rouble note signed "Anonymous." In years she was the youngest of the players, being forty-three.

The eldest of the players, Maslenikov, was at first annoyed with the arrangement of the partnerships, since it meant that he always had to play with Jacov Ivanovitch—in other words, to give up his dream of a grand slam in no trumps. In every respect he and his partner were unsuited for each other. Jacov Ivanovitch was a withered little old man, silent and solemn, and even in summer he went about with coat and trousers lined with wadding. He always came at eight o'clock, not a minute earlier or later, and instantly took a small piece of chalk in his dry fingers, on one of which a large diamond ring moved about freely. The most dreadful thing about his partner, Maslenikov considered, was the fact that he never bid higher than four tricks, even when he had a good hand and the game was certain. It happened once that Jacov Ivanovitch began with the two and went on to the ace, taking every trick to the thirteenth. Maslenikov furiously threw down his cards on the table, and the little old man gathered them up quietly and scored the number of points necessary for four tricks.

"Why didn't you declare a grand slam?" cried Nikolai Dmitrievitch. (That was Maslenikov's name.)

"I never play higher than four," the old man replied dryly, and added in explanation: "You never know what may happen."

And Nikolai Dmitrievitch could never

* A game similar to auction bridge played in Russia before the latter became the vogue.

convince him. He himself always played a bold game, and being unlucky in his hand, he invariably lost, but he never despaired, and kept on hoping to win the next time. By degrees they grew used to their position and ceased interfering with each other. Nikolai Dmitrievitch ran risks ; the old man quietly marked down their losses and declared four.

Thus they played summer and winter, spring and autumn. The crazy world, submissively bearing the burden of endless existence, now reddened with blood, now bathed in tears, was marking its course through space with the groans of the sick, the hungry and injured. A faint echo of this disturbing alien life was brought by Nikolai Dmitrievitch. Sometimes he came in late, when the rest were already seated at the table, the cards, like a pink fan, spread over its green surface.

Nikolai Dmitrievitch, red-cheeked, with the fresh air still about him, hastily took his seat opposite Jacov Ivanovitch, and, excusing himself, said :

" What a lot of people there are walking in the boulevards ! They come and come without end . . ."

Evpraksia Vasilievna considered it her duty as hostess to pay no heed to the peculiarities of her guests. Thus she was the only one to reply, while the little old man, silent and solemn, was preparing the chalk, and her brother was making arrangements about the tea.

" Yes, the weather must be fine. But hadn't we better begin ? "

And they began. The lofty room grew still, every sound being deadened by upholstered furniture and heavy hangings. A maid moved noiselessly over the soft carpet, handing round glasses of strong tea ; there was only the rustle of her starched skirt, the squeak of the chalk, the sigh of Nikolai Dmitrievitch, marking his first fine. His glass of tea was always weak and placed on a separate table, for he liked to drink it from the saucer.

In winter Nikolai Dmitrievitch would remark that in the morning there had been ten degrees of frost, which had risen now to twelve, and in the summer he would say :

" A company of people has just gone into the wood with baskets."

Evpraksia Vasilievna would look up politely (in summer they played on the verandah), and though not a cloud was in sight and the tops of the firs shone golden. she would say :

" I wonder if it will rain ? "

And the little old man, Jacov Ivanovitch, spread the cards solemnly, and taking out a two, decided that Nikolai Dmitrievitch was an incorrigibly frivolous man. Once Maslenikov greatly alarmed the rest. Every time he came he made a remark or two about Dreyfus. With a melancholy air he would say :

" The Dreyfus case is going badly."

Or, on the other hand, he would laugh and declare that the unjust sentence would probably be revoked.

Later he took to bringing newspapers from which he read paragraphs, always about Dreyfus.

" Have you finished ? " Jacov Ivanovitch asked dryly, but his partner did not hear him and went on reading the paragraphs that interested him. In this manner he one day led the rest into a dispute which nearly developed into a quarrel, for Evpraksia Vasilievna refused to acknowledge the order of legal proceedings and demanded that Dreyfus should be instantly released, while Jacov Ivanovitch and her brother maintained that it was at first necessary to go through certain formalities and then to release him. Jacov Ivanovitch was the first to recollect himself. Pointing to the table, he said :

" Isn't it time to begin ? "

And they sat down to play, and no matter what Nikolai Dmitrievitch said about Dreyfus afterwards, he was met by a stolid silence.

Thus they played summer and winter, spring and autumn. Sometimes an incident of an amusing nature happened, such as that Evpraksia Vasilievna's brother forgot what his partner had said about her hand and did not take a single trick, when he had felt absolutely certain of five. Then Nikolai Dmitrievitch laughed aloud and exaggerated the importance of the loss, while the old man, smiling, said :

" Had you declared four, you know, the money would have remained in your pocket."

A tense excitement took possession of them all whenever Evpraksia Vasilievna made a high bid. She flushed red, lost her head, not knowing where to put the cards, and gazed at her silent brother entreatingly, while her opponents, with a chivalrous sympathy for her womanly helplessness, encouraged her with their condescending

smiles, as they waited impatiently for the result. In general, however, they were serious and thoughtful when playing. To them the cards had long ceased to be mere lifeless matter, and every suit and every card in it had its own individuality, and lived its own particular life. There were suits they liked and suits they did not like, lucky suits and unlucky suits. The cards arranged themselves in infinite monotony, and this monotony was subject neither to analysis nor rule, and was at the same time right and proper. People desired to have their way, and did what they liked with them, while the cards did their own work, as though possessed of individual will, taste, sympathy and caprice. Hearts often fell to Jacov Ivanovitch, while Evpraksia Vasilievna would constantly receive spades, though she hated spades. Sometimes the cards would be capricious and Jacov Ivanovitch did not know how to escape from spades, while Evpraksia Vasilievna delighted with her hearts, bid high and lost. At such times the cards seemed to laugh.

No particular suit ever fell to Nikolai Dmitrievitch for several times running, and his cards generally bore an air of hotel visitors who come and go and are indifferent as to the place where they shall lodge for the few days. For several evenings following sometimes he got nothing but twos and threes, coming to him with an insolent, mocking air. Nikolai Dmitrievitch was convinced that he could never bid a grand slam because the cards knew of his ambition and did not come to him out of sheer malice. And he affected a complete indifference to his declaration and tried to delay looking at his hand. But the cards were rarely deceived by his manner; they usually saw through this device, and when he opened his hand three sixes laughed out at him, and the king of spades, whom they had dragged in for company, gave him a solemn smile.

Evpraksia Vasilievna fathomed the mysterious qualities of the cards less than the rest; the old man, Jacov Ivanovitch, had long attained a severe, philosophic attitude, and was never surprised or grieved, possessing the invincible armour against fate in his rule of never playing higher than four. Only Nikolai Dmitrievitch could never reconcile himself to the capricious character of the cards, their mockery and inconsistency. When going to bed he would imagine himself playing a grand slam in no trumps, and it seemed so simple and possible; one ace would come, then a king, then another ace. But when, full of hope, he sat down to play the following evening, the cursed sixes would be grinning at him once more. There was something fateful and malicious about it. And gradually a grand slam in no trumps became the dream and ambition of Nikolai Dmitrievitch's life.

¶

OTHER events happened which had no relation to cards. Evpraksia Vasilievna's large white tom-cat died of old age, and with the landlord's permission was buried beneath a lime-tree in the garden. Then Nikolai Dmitrievitch once disappeared for two whole weeks and the other three did not know what to think or what to do, since *vint* for three was contrary to their habits and considered dull. The cards, too, seemed to be conscious of it and arranged themselves in the strangest manner. When Nikolai Dmitrievitch appeared again his ruddy cheeks, so marked in contrast to his mass of grey hair, had grown pale, and altogether he seemed slighter and smaller of build. He said that his eldest son had been arrested for something and sent to St. Petersburg. They were all surprised, since no one knew that Maslenikov had a son; no doubt he had told them at some time or another, but they had forgotten the fact. Not long after he disappeared for a second time, and on a Saturday too, when they played longer than on any other evening—and again they all learnt in wonder that he had long suffered from heart disease, and had had a bad attack on Saturday.

And once more they settled down, and their game became more serious and absorbing, for Nikolai Dmitrievitch now rarely created a diversion in the form of irrelevant conversation. There was only the rustle of the maid's starched skirt as the satin-backed cards slipped through their fingers, living their own mysterious, silent life, apart from the life of the people who played with them. To Nikolai Dmitrievitch they were as indifferent as ever, sometimes even malicious and mocking; there was something fatalistic about them.

On Thursday, the 26th November, an unusual change took place in the cards. The game had no sooner begun than Nikolai Dmitrievitch obtained a sequence and took

not merely the five tricks he had declared, but made a small slam, as it turned out that Jacov Ivanovitch had an extra ace he had not wanted to show. Then for a time the usual sixes appeared again, but soon disappeared, giving place to full suits that came in strict order, as though each suit was eager to witness Nikolai Dmitrievitch's joy. He declared hand after hand, to the astonishment of all, even quiet little Jacov Ivanovitch. Nikolai Dmitrievitch's excitement communicated itself to the other players; the cards slipped quickly from his fat perspiring fingers with the wrinkles on the knuckles.

"You are in luck to-day," said Evpraksia Vasilievna's brother solemnly; he had no faith in sudden good fortune; in his experience it was always followed by misfortune.

Evpraksia Vasilievna was pleased that Nikolai Dmitrievitch had good cards at last, and at her brother's words she spat three times to the side to counteract his prophecy of evil.

"Faugh! there is nothing unusual; the cards come and come, and I hope they will keep on coming."

For a moment the cards seemed to be uncertain; a few twos appeared with a guilty air, and then again with greater rapidity came the aces, kings and queens. Nikolai Dmitrievitch had barely time to collect his cards and make his declaration; twice he made a false deal, and had to deal the cards over again. And he was lucky in every hand, though Jacov Ivanovitch maintained a stolid silence about his aces; the latter's astonishment had given place to a disbelief in this rapid change of fortune, and once again he reminded his partner of his fixed rule of never playing higher than four.

Nikolai Dmitrievitch flushed and panted; he became angry with him. He no longer hesitated over his leads and bid high boldly, confident that he would draw what he wanted from the pack.

When, after solemn Prokopy Vasilievitch had dealt the cards, Maslenikov uncovered his hand, his heart gave a bound and instantly sank. Darkness appeared before his eyes, and he swayed to and fro; his hand contained twelve tricks—clubs and hearts from the ace to the ten, and the ace and king of diamonds. If he drew the ace of spades, he would have a grand slam in no trumps.

"Two in no trumps," he began, controlling his voice with difficulty.

"Three in spades," replied Evpraksia Vasilievna, who was also very excited, having nearly all the spades from the king down.

"Four in hearts," Jacov Ivanovitch said dryly.

Nikolai Dmitrievitch instantly declared a small slam, but Evpraksia Vasilievna, excited, would not give way, and though she knew quite well that it was hopeless, declared a grand slam in spades. Nikolai Dmitrievitch hesitated for a moment, and then in a somewhat triumphant tone, behind which he concealed his misgiving, pronounced slowly:

"A grand slam in no trumps!"

Nikolai Dmitrievitch was to play a grand slam in no trumps! All were amazed, and the hostess's brother even exclaimed "Oh!"

Nikolai Dmitrievitch stretched out his hand to the pack, but he swayed and upset a candle. Evpraksia Vasilievna seized it, and Nikolai Dmitrievitch for a moment sat straight and motionless, laying his cards on the table, then he threw up his hands and slowly fell over to the left. When falling he upset a little table on which stood a saucer of tea, his body hitting against the leg.

¶

WHEN the doctor arrived he declared Nikolai Dmitrievitch to have died of heart failure, and to console the living he said a few words about the painlessness of such a death. The dead man was laid on a Turkish divan in the room where they had been playing and covered with a sheet; he looked gruesome and terrifying. One foot, turned inwards, remained uncovered and did not seem to belong to him, as though it were the foot of another man; on the sole of the boot, still quite black and new in the instep, a piece of chocolate paper adhered. The card-table stood as it had been left, the cards thrown down in disorder, backs downwards; only Nikolai Dmitrievitch's cards lay in a forlorn little heap as he had placed them.

Jacov Ivanovitch with short uncertain tread paced the room, trying not to look at the dead man, not to step off the carpet on to the polished floor, where his heels made a loud intermittent clatter. Passing the table several times he stopped, and carefully taking up Nikolai Dmitrievitch's

cards, he examined them, then arranging them in the same order as before he quietly put them back on the table. He then examined the pack; there was the ace of spades, the very card Nikolai Dmitrievitch had needed for his grand slam. Pacing up and down a few more times, Jacov Ivanovitch went into the next room, where he buttoned his wadding-lined coat still closer about him. He wept bitterly, for he pitied the dead man. Closing his eyes he tried to recall Nikolai Dmitrievitch's face as it had been when he was alive, laughing over his winnings. He was particularly moved when he recalled Nikolai Dmitrievitch's vanity, and his desire to play a grand slam in no trumps. All the events of the evening passed before him, beginning with the five tricks in diamonds the dead man had played and ending with the continuous flow of lucky cards which in itself foreboded evil. And now Nikolai Dmitrievitch was dead—dead, just when he could have played a grand slam.

An idea, terrifying in its simplicity, struck the emaciated little body of Jacov Ivanovitch, causing him to leap from his chair. Peering round as though the thought had not come to him of its own accord, but had been whispered by someone into his ear, he said aloud:

"But he will never know that the ace was in the pack, and that his hand contained a certain grand slam. Never! Never!"

And it seemed to Jacov Ivanovitch that he had not understood until this moment what death really meant. And now he understood, and the thing he saw plainly was senseless, awful, irrevocable. He would never know! Were Jacov Ivanovitch to cry it into his very ear and hold the cards before his very eyes, Nikolai Dmitrievitch would not hear him and would not know, because Nikolai Dmitrievitch was no more. One more movement, one more second of life and Nikolai Dmitrievitch would have seen the ace and known that he had a grand slam, but now all was over and he did not know and would never know.

"Nev-er, nev-er," Jacov Ivanovitch said slowly to convince himself that such a word existed and had meaning.

The word existed and had meaning, but the meaning was so strange and so bitter that Jacov Ivanovitch again fell into a chair and wept helplessly. He pitied Nikola Dmitrievitch in that he would never know, and he pitied himself and everyone, since this senseless, cruel thing would happen to him and to everyone alike. He wept—and in thought he played Nikolai Dmitrievitch's hand, taking trick after trick to the thirteenth, and thinking how much they would have scored, and that this too Nikolai Dmitrievitch would never know. This was the first and last time he had ignored his fixed rule of four, and had played a grand slam in no trumps for friendship's sake.

"Is that you, Jacov Ivanovitch?" asked Evpraksia Vasilievna, entering. She sank into a chair beside him and burst into tears. "How awful! How awful!"

They both looked at each other and wept silently, conscious that in the next room, on the divan, was a dead man's body, cold, heavy and silent.

"Have you sent word to his people?" asked Jacov Ivanovitch, blowing his nose violently.

"Yes, my brother and Annushka have gone, but I don't know how they will find his home, for we haven't got his address."

"Isn't he living in the same place as last year?" Jacov Ivanovitch asked absent-mindedly.

"No, he had moved. Annushka says that he used to take an isvoschick somewhere to the Novensky Boulevard."

"They will find out through the police," the little old man comforted her. "I believe he has a wife, hasn't he?"

Evpraksia Vasilievna gazed pensively at Jacov Ivanovitch and made no reply. It seemed to him that in her eyes he saw reflected the very thought that had just come to him. Once more he blew his nose, put the handkerchief into the pocket of his wadding-lined coat and said, raising his eyebrows questioningly above his reddened eyes:

"And where shall we get a fourth now?"

But Evpraksia Vasilievna, engrossed in thoughts of a domestic nature, did not hear him. After a short pause she asked:

"Are you still living in the same place, Jacov Ivanovitch?"

# The Best of The Bushrangers

*"For one rogue still suspects another"*

**By E. W. HORNUNG**

ADMITTEDLY they were a very bad lot indeed, to be the best of whom was to remain a double-dyed villain after all. There is, however, abundant evidence that Henry Power, alias Henry Johnston, the really gallant ruffian who, under arms, robbed one hundred and fourteen persons (but never a woman) without killing one, was something more than the boldest and yet least bloodthirsty of Australian bushrangers. There was more transparent good in him than the world has usually discovered in its great criminals, and a vast deal more than will transpire in the following anecdote, which is no pretty fable of sinner turned saint. It is, on the other hand, one of the many yarns current in the Colony of Victoria, and more or less illustrative of the fine audacity, rough-and-ready chivalry and grim humour of Power.

The affair began as a professional incident of the almost every-day routine. It appears that Power was short of money, and of other sinews of the guerilla warfare which it was his pleasure to wage against mankind. He had therefore descended from his fastness among the ranges (that despair of the police), and put himself in ambush at a point commanding a fairly straight stretch of the nearest coaching road, at a point where it descended through thick timber to a creek, to rise very abruptly on the opposite side. It was in the bed of this creek, which was all but dry, that Power hid, watching for the coach, but wistfully desiring the earlier apparition of easier prey.

There were two sides to sticking up a coach. You got more out of it, but you ran very much greater risks. Among half-a-dozen male passengers there was too strong a chance of at least one set of nerves and one stock of courage to equal those of the bushranger.

Judge therefore of his joy when a single horseman appeared a good hour before any coach was due. The outlaw's first act was to spring upon his horse, by whose side its considerate master had been standing in the dry-bed of the creek; he badly needed a better mount, and at a glance he made sure of that at least. The approaching rider came thundering down the gentler slope at a headlong pace which argued the sure foot and the sound knees which were Power's primary requirements, and he had to put spurs to his own worn steed in order to intercept his victim.

But for once Power had trouble with his man, whose behaviour was aggravated by his youth. In an instant this intrepid young man had dragged his horse almost upon his haunches, so that sparks flew from its slithering hind hoofs, while a revolver spat quickly but wildly, as it were between the animal's ears. The bushranger, sitting uninjured, seemed too amazed to return the fire.

The chase that followed was short and sharp enough, yet it carried the couple well back from the road, and it finished in a glade green with ferns and open to the downpour of a vertical sun. The young man's horse had stumbled, emptying the young man over its head; but he was up again in an instant, his white face working in the strong light. And it would seem to have been the more desperate face of the two; though covered now by a long barrel, held with muscles of iron against a shoulder-like rock.

"Throw up those hands, sonny, or you're a dead boy."

"I don't care!"

And the fool made a suicidal effort to fling himself into his saddle; whereupon Power spurring closer with an oath, rapped him smartly across the head with his rifle barrel.

"There! I've let you off for the last time. Up with those hands like winky, or I'll drill a hole through you."

There was no help for it, and this time the youth obeyed, though with bitter grace, and eyes wild with hatred for his panting horse. It was the better one of the two; the chase had proved it; but for that

stumble, he would have got away. His heart seemed broken by his failure to do so; his jaw fell, his lips trembled. It was as though he stood confronted with instant death. Power had seen the look before.

"I'm, not a-going to shoot now, my boy," said he, "not unless you try them games again. Do you know who I am? I'm Harry Power. Did you never hear of me before?"

"Oh, I've heard of you," said the young man, gloomily, "and I knew who you were from the first."

There was, indeed, no mistaking the firm, square shoulders, the snuff-coloured beard, and the piercing black eyes of Henry Power. He was not only the typical bushranger of his generation, he was the very prince of his type.

"Then why did you want to make me go and plug you, my lad? You know, or ought to know, that I never did such a thing in the whole course of my career."

The youth was not listening; he was peering down towards the road (which lay deep in a timbered basin of the ranges), though with little of the eagerness that might have been looked for in a captive. The outlaw's grin turned none the less quickly to a frown; his vanity was piqued, his suspicions aroused.

"I've told you my name," he at last exclaimed, sternly. "Suppose you take the trouble to look this way and tell me yours?"

"John Smith," was the prompt reply—made, however, with an insolent disregard of the preliminary command.

"Your real name!" cried the bushranger, turning brown in the face. "And you look at me, you jackanapes, or, by Heaven, I'll make you!"

Whereupon the young man complied, but as one who heard the summons for the first time and did not hear the threats at all.

"All right," he said at length; "after all, it can't do any real harm. My name is John, but I don't mind admitting it isn't Smith. It's Jack Falcon."

"And not a bad name for you, either," said Power, regaining his good nature with the point; "for there's more than a bit of the hawk about you, if you ask me. But see here, sonny, if you're a hawk I'm a darned great eagle; and you stuff that into your pipe!"

And the outlaw tapped his piece with grim humour; but the other twitched shoulders with a wry smile and an involuntary glance towards the road.

"I'm less cool than you think," said he.

"What's the good of looking down there?"

"It's the road, you know," said Falcon, suggestively. But he had the sense to turn his back upon it.

"Well? What then? Do you think I'm going to let you hail the coach?"

"I don't suppose you are."

"I don't suppose I am," echoed the bushranger, dryly; "so you may as well make the best of it, and turn those pockets of yours inside out. Quick's the word, and don't you miss any!"

Pale as he had been before, young Falcon turned paler yet at this explicit command. His fingers fumbled at his pockets, as if to gain time.

"Stop a bit," said Power, displaying unexpected patience. "Where do you come from, eh?"

"Euroa," said Falcon, sullenly.

Power's face lighted up.

"Aha!" said he. "And you're on your way down to Melbourne, are you?"

"I was, but I've given that up."

"Then you're a young fool," said Power, testily. "Don't you know me by hearsay better than that? Are you such a blessed new chum that you've never heard tell o' me before? I may be a bad lot, but I'm not one of the worst. I may take the lion's share, but darn my skin if I ever took all! No, no; you'll have to part with that horse and saddle of yours, but you'll find mine'll take you down to Melbourne all right, though you won't have to go quite so fast as you were going just now. And I'm not going to take your last stiver; you shall keep enough for drinks along the road. So you let me see the colour of your coin."

Falcon, however, must renew his fumbling; and Power had to cock his rifle with a horrid click and still worse oaths before the young fool would obey. By this time the latter had shown his hand; and it was a very fine hand of bank-notes, extracted with piteous reluctance, from an inner pocket. But it was not fine enough for the wily Power, who shook his head over the notes.

"No, no, my son; you don't ride like that for fifty pounds, nor yet look a rifle in the muzzle as you've been looking into mine; not to speak of the way you let loose with your own little iron to start with. So where's the rest of it?"

"The rest! Isn't fifty pounds enough for you?"

" It might be if it was the lot."

" I tell you it is ! "

" Your tongue may," said Power, " but your face and your voice are singing another tune. You've acted your part very pretty, makin' all them bones about fifty pounds, but you've got to act better than that to do old Power in the weather eye. I want the rest—that's what I want, and if there's enough of it I don't say but what you mayn't get your fifty quid back again. I never clean a man right out if I can help it. But I've got to see what there is."

Falcon held his tongue; his face was half-sulks and half-defiance. He was still not acting badly.

" Right you are," said Power. " It's all one to me. Suppose you begin by pulling off them precious fine riding-boots ? "

And the acting ceased upon the word.

¶

THE noonday sun, pouring yet more vertically into that oasis of green ferns amid a forest of tall and sombre trees, threw a striking tableau into strong relief. Falcon was seated among the ferns, his long boots off, his head between his hands; in one of the boots the bushranger's arm was plunged to the elbow, presently to be withdrawn with a pad of crackling paper, folded like a cork sole. In his other hand was a similar packet.

" I'm going to stick to these two lots," said Power at length, " so you may as well tell me what they come to between them."

" Thirteen hundred altogether."

Falcon had not looked up; the outlaw's eyes were fixed upon him, and in their depths there danced an altogether new interest in the man with the head between his hands.

" And how came you to be riding like greased lightning with thirteen hundred pounds in your boots ? "

" It wasn't my money," groaned the young man through his hands.

" Glad to hear it," chuckled Power. " I've no wish to ruin you, my son."

" But that's just what you are doing ! " cried Falcon, looking up wildly. " It's not my money, but I'm responsible for it. It belongs to the National Bank of Australasia. I'm a clerk in the Euroa branch."

Power's eyes twinkled.

" That all, sonny ? "

" Why not ? " asked Falcon, his wild eyes fixed suddenly on those of the bushranger. " What else do you think I am ? "

" I don't hardly like to say," pretended Power, grinning outright.

" I'll soon tell you."

" Will you ? Then I hope I'm right," exclaimed the bushranger, with encouraging emphasis; " for it did just slip across my mind—you'll forgive me if I'm wrong—that you was one of my own kidney ! "

" Say it plainer."

" Well, then, I believe you've been and done a bolt from that same bank with these same thirteen hundred and fifty pounds ! In which case——"

" Well ? " said Falcon, who had opened his lips to say something else.

" In which case," repeated Power, gravely, " you shall have more than the odd fifty back again; for we shall be two of a trade; and there's honour among thieves—as long as I'm one of 'em."

" I'm glad to hear you say so," rejoined the bank clerk; " for I'm the other."

He was cool enough now, the younger rogue. He had made up his mind and accepted his fate, and it promised to be no such disastrous fate after all. Indeed, there were obvious advantages for the mere novitiate in crime, in a temporary alliance with a past master in the criminal arts. The clerk was (it has since appeared) a very clear-headed and calculating young man, who had yielded to no sudden temptation, but had put into unerring execution a plan laboriously laid in the coldest of cold blood. He had certainly lost that excellent head of his in the sudden presence of the one peril he had not foreseen, but he was now once more in full possession of his most distinctive faculties. He had therefore no hesitation in taking in his rather delicate hand the horny paw which was now thrust over to him in tacit sign of felonious fellowship, nor did he scruple to tell the true story of his crime.

It was a sordid story, with no redeeming point. It was a story of manifold treachery, involving weeks of petty but consistent hypocrisy, and the final playing of a part which opened even the bold black eyes of Harry Power. As he said himself, it wasn't his way of doing things.

" It's all a matter of taste," he conceded, " and you get the same for it when you're caught. Likely we shall meet in the hulks, one of these days, but I rather think I shall have the liveliest time to look back upon,

always supposing I don't blow the brains out o' some spunky young chap like you, and swing according."

He sat looking critically at Falcon, while he puffed at a short black pipe.

"And you did show spunk—with me," said Power, half to himself, "you loosed out upon me like a good 'un; and I'm not going to forget it. I know pluck when I see it.

The compliment was lost upon the clerk. He had turned where he sat, and Power watching the sharp profile saw the visible eye protruding out like a bead. Next moment he had followed its direction and descried the cause—a fitful glitter of accoutrements far away through the trees, clearly accompanied sharp ringing of well-shod hoofs upon the flint-strewn track.

"Oho!" said Power; "so it's the traps, is it? Get you down into the gully; there, behind you, where the ferns are thickest. Down you go—right down—and down with your horse's head! Hang on to the reins like grim death! If his head don't show, nothing else will; but I'll have to learn him different when he's mine!"

And at a whispered word his own worn veteran lay down like a dog, while the outlaw himself knelt behind a tree, and the staccato tattoo of approaching hoofs grew louder.

"Can you see them yet?" whispered Falcon, who lay buried in bracken, his horse's head held close to his own by shortened rein and straining muscles.

"I will in a minute. There's three or four of 'em. See here, son, if that moke of yours offers to neigh, you cut its throat with this." And a villainous blade came swishing and glittering within Falcon's reach. "Stick him like a sheep," continued Power, "the moment he opens his teeth to it; but he won't do that if you hold on tight. Don't speak till I tell you."

The clerk obeyed, lying on his back, his biceps bulging, and the perspiration welling from a white face in imminent danger of being pawed beyond human semblance by his already restive horse. But the outlaw's horse lay like the clown's in a circus. And the outlaw himself did not practise what he preached, but apostrophised the white helmets and the bearded faces, as they went bobbing past upon the road below, in murmurs of half-affectionate abuse.

When Falcon had finished stretching himself in the sun, he turned to the older criminal for the expert opinion and the skilled advice to which the situation clearly entitled him. Power had frustrated the final issue of his darling scheme; the least that he could do for a humble follower in his own footsteps, whom he had hindered instead of helping at the outset of his career, was to present him, from the wealth of his experience, with some new plan of escape.

So hinted the clerk, and Power nodded with characteristic good-humour. He seemed to realise his responsibility in the matter. The charge of unprofessional conduct, rather humorously insinuated by the other, was taken by Power in equally good part.

"Native of this colony?" he inquired at length.

"No."

"New chum?

"Not exactly. I came out from home the year before last. It was another bank bother. They gave me so long to clear out."

The clerk was devoid of shame. The other looked him up and down.

"And how did you know the road so well?"

"I rode over it for my Christmas holiday."

"You had this in your mind since Christmas?"

"I had it in my mind since last July!"

Power maintained a longer silence than any hitherto. His dark eyes were half covered by reflective lids. Falcon grew restive under the prolonged scrutiny.

"Well," said the bushranger at length, "I'm going to do with you what I've never done with any living man. I'm going to take you along with me for a bit. I'm going to show you where you can lie low for a month of Sundays if you like, with every trap in Victoria scouring the country for you. I've done it, so I ought to know. I'm going to let you do it, because I seem to owe you something. But, my son, there's one thing I'm not going to do!"

Falcon waited to hear what.

"I'm not going to trust you. So I tell you straight. You'll go there blindfold, and you'll come back blindfold.

The bushranger paused again, and tapped his handsome head with firm forefinger.

"When there's a few hundreds on a man's head, on or off his shoulders," said he grimly, "he don't put up for the Melbourne Club, nor yet pick his teeth on the steps of Scott's Hotel."

The rest of that day they journeyed together through the veriest wilderness,

not trackless, indeed, but veined only here and there with the roughest bridle-path, and that not always visible to the clerk's eyes, which were left unbandaged after all. Time enough of that upon the morrow (said Power), for it would take them the best part of another day to reach his lair. Meanwhile they must camp somewhere for the night. And camp they did, in a rocky hollow, upon the jagged banks of a tiny creek, that seemed to have lost its way amid the grim solitudes of the mountain forest.

It was a cheerless bivouac. The bush-ranger produced a box of sardines and a slab of very stale damper; these he divided with the clerk, but he would have no fire for fear of attracting the police; so the meal was eaten in darkness and washed down with very cold water from the creek. Now the month was March, when the sun is still its summer self, but the nights are the nights of incipient winter; and this was the first time the clerk had ever slept in the open; it was therefore not astonishing that he should begin shivering over his pipe as evening cooled and darkened into night.

"What's the matter?" asked Power, who was resting on one elbow, in such an attitude that he might have been watching the dim figure of his companion or might have been asleep.

"Oh, nothing," said the clerk, in a voice half startled, half relieved, "It's a bit chilly, that's all. But I thought you were asleep?"

"Maybe I was," said Power; "but, you see, I sleep with one eye open—and one ear too. So you're cold, are you? That's soon mended. Lend us a hand."

He groped for Falcon's, found it in the darkness, and pulled himself to his feet.

"Well, your hand's not cold, anyhow," said he. "It's as hot as a coal. Have you got a bit of fever on you?"

"No," said the clerk. "I'm all right."

Yet his voice shook like his limbs.

"You may be," said Power, "and you may not. I've got a blanket for you, whether or not."

He detached a soft blue cylinder from his saddle which was slung over a low branch of the tree, to which the horses stood tethered and at hand. Falcon, however, flatly refused to have it over him; he was not going to take the only blanket, and he said so with more heat than gratitude. But in mere will, like the majority of mankind, he was no match for Power.

"Why," cried he, "you may call this cold, but you wouldn't if you were used to camping out like me. I call it mild as milk; but then I'm as hard as a flint myself. That blanket's all I use in the depth of winter, and I wasn't even going to unroll it; but now I have you've got to curl up in it, whether you like it or not."

Nor was this all; for it seemed that the elder ruffian was prepared against emergencies with a flask, which he handed to Falcon, after tucking him up with his own overbearing hands. In this case, however, the clerk made no demur, but drank eagerly.

Not that Power resented the omission. The moon was rising through the trees, and the outlaw looked pityingly down upon the flushed but haggard face which its first rays touched. Clearly the clerk was ill; he seemed, nevertheless, to have fallen instantly asleep; and Power was quicker still to follow his example, with this difference, that the bushranger's nose at once announced his condition.

¶

IT was not this that awoke the clerk; he had never been asleep at all. His eyes had opened as soon as the bushranger's back was turned. He had lain for some minutes, glancing at the moon, still flushed and still haggard. Convinced at last by the time and timbre of the snores, he was now resting on one elbow, and his teeth showed white in the moonlight. They were set. And the eyes were brilliants in a ghastly face. For in very truth the man was in a fever. But it was a fever of the mind and of the heart.

Why should he be robbed in his turn? Why should he even share his ill-gotten gains with a greater villain than himself? Like many another, he had fallen a victim to the brutal rapacity of the notorious Power; unlike the rest, however, the clerk was not contented to remain victim to the chapter's end. It was his turn to get the upper hand, and get it he would. He was in any case a desperate man. He had flung his good name to the winds, he had no further right to his liberty, was he also to lose that for which he was risking and renouncing so much? Not if he could help it. And there was only one sure way of helping it.

But now the raw spirit was at work in his brain, nerving him, hardening him, and he would not remember who it was to whom he owed his Dutch courage. Or if he remembered, he dismissed the consideration as a sentimental weakness. What was a

notorious bushranger but a menace and a curse to society at large, to be shot down at sight like a mad dog?

Falcon fell to trembling again, and loathed himself for his weakness. Perhaps, after all, he might give the fellow a chance, might call upon him to surrender, or at least wake him before he fired. It was not incumbent upon him—he would not admit that—but it might satisfy some sense of which even the clerk possessed a measure. Yes, he should have his chance; but what a chance it would be, the clerk knew in his heart; and, first of all, he must obtain possession of the rifle; for Power had not permitted him to recover his own fire-arm, and the little cartridges were rotting uselessly in his pockets. If only he could get possession of the rifle!

During their ride through the bush Power had carried it slung across his broad shoulders; but had detached it before lying down, and now it lay loose at his side, with but the barrel under the crook of his arm, gleaming steadily in the moonlight.

The clerk threw off the blanket which had been wrapped about him, and breathed more freely when rid of it. Then he rose to a sitting posture; then lunged softly forward upon his hands and knees.

He was actually kneeling over the prostrate man, who was snoring as loud as ever. One delicate hand was planted palm downwards upon the ground between the sprawling legs; the other was creeping slowly towards the stock of the gleaming rifle.

The rifle moved; the sleeper did not. In a single second it was withdrawn altogether, and—the tables were turned. Falcon knelt upright, trembling still, but yet able to cock the piece with the least possible noise. Now he was ready—now he would cry "Surrender" in his turn. But he would not hesitate to fire. And then—then there would be an entirely new situation to face at his leisure. A few hundreds on his head! The ruffian had said so himself; they were his very own words. And what if he, Falcon, were to claim this blood-money—to profess that he had borrowed that of the bank merely as a bait? He would be forgiven, free, and yet have those hundreds to the good!

Meanwhile his mouth had grown very dry; he could not cry the one word needful without moistening it; and in the instant this took him, that happened which had been almost certain to happen from the first. A slight move on the sleeper's part—a sudden and relentless pull at the trigger—a wild cry waking the echoes of the silent bush—and the two men face to face in the moonlight. For the hammer had fallen with a harmless metallic click, and the cry had come from the clerk, who was kneeling still, but kneeling for mercy now.

Power was slow to speak.

"You blithering fool! So you thought I'd lie down with a loaded gun—and you! Didn't I warn you I wouldn't trust you? But I must have forgot that myself to close an eye, with you handy. And to think——"

He sat silent, dumb with his contempt. Then a grim light broke upon his face.

"Why, I stuck you up with an empty gun, you silly! How do you like that? Make you feel better? But this one isn't empty," and he pulled out a full-sized Colt.

"That's it," cried the clerk, finding a high voice. "Shoot me—shoot me dead!"

The bushranger shook his head.

"Not me, sonny! I don't waste powder and ball on such carrion as you, who'd shoot a man in his sleep for the blood-money on his head! No! there's nicer things reserved for such as you."

"What things?" shrieked the writhing wretch. "What? What?"

"You'll see, sonny! Oh, you'll see!"

But it was the police who saw best, for by a poetic irony (not unforeseen by Power) it was they who found their original quarry when returning on their tracks some hours later. They found him tied to a tree, close to the road where he had been first waylaid; with plenty of breath (and little else) in his body, but the circulation stopped in half his limbs; and over his head the following document, uncouthly printed with a burnt stick and tied to the tree with strands of whipcord:—

RECEIVED
FROM THE NATIONAL BANK OF AUSTRALASIA (EUROA BRANCH)
PER THE UNDERTIED
THIRTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY POUND (£1,350 os. od.)
(Signed) H. POWER.
HIS MARK FOR LIFE.

And the mark, though fresh, inflamed, and greatly swollen, was a none the less plain round ring, burnt in the very middle of Falcon's forehead, apparently with a red-hot rifle barrel.

# Ladies In Lavender

*How romance came too late to The Misses Widdington*

**By WILLIAM J. LOCKE**

AS soon as the sun rose out of the sea its light streamed through a white-curtained casement window into the whitest and most spotless room you can imagine. It shone upon two little white beds, separated by the width of the floor covered with straw-coloured matting; on white garments neatly folded which lay on white chairs by the side of each bed; on a white enamelled bedroom suite; on the one picture (over the mantelpiece) which adorned the white walls, the enlarged photograph of a white-whiskered, elderly gentleman in naval uniform; and on the white, placid faces of the sleepers.

It awakened Miss Ursula Widdington, who sat up in bed, greeted it with a smile, and forthwith aroused her sister.

"Janet, here's the sun."

Miss Widdington awoke and smiled too.

Now to awake at daybreak with a smile and a childlike delight at the sun when you are over forty-five is a sign of an unruffled conscience and a sweet disposition.

"The first glimpse of it for a week," said Miss Widdington.

"Isn't it strange," said Miss Ursula, "that when we went to sleep the storm was still raging?"

"And now—the sea hasn't gone down yet. Listen."

"The tide's coming in. Let us go out and look at it," cried Miss Ursula, delicately getting out of bed.

"You're so impulsive, Ursula," said Miss Widdington.

She was forty-eight, and three years older than her sister. She could therefore smile indulgently at the impetuosity of youth. But she rose and dressed, and presently the two ladies stole out of the silent house.

They had lived there for many years, perched away on top of a projecting cliff on the Cornish coast, midway between sea and sky, like two fairy princesses in an enchanted bit of the world's end, who had grown grey with waiting for the prince who never came. Theirs was the only house on the wind-swept height. Below in the bay on the right of their small headland nestled the tiny fishing village of Trevannic; below, sheer down to the left, lay a little sandy cove, accessible farther on by a narrow gorge that split the majestic stretch of bastioned cliffs. To that little stone weather-beaten house their father, the white-whiskered gentleman of the portrait, had brought them quite young when he had retired from the Navy with a pension and a grievance—an ungrateful country had not made him an admiral—and there, after his death, they had continued to lead their remote and gentle lives, untouched by the happenings of the great world.

The salt-laden wind buffeted them, dashed strands of hair stingingly across their faces and swirled their skirts around them as they leaned over the stout stone parapet their father had built along the edge of the cliff, and drank in the beauty of the morning. The eastern sky was clear of clouds and the eastern sea tossed a fierce silver under the sun and gradually deepened into frosted green, which changed in the west into the deep ocean blue; and the Atlantic heaved and sobbed after its turmoil of the day before. Miss Ursula pointed to the gilt-edged clouds in the west and likened them to angels' thrones, which was a pretty conceit. Miss Widdington derived a suggestion of Pentecostal flames from the golden flashes of the sea-gulls' wings. Then she referred to the appetite they would have for breakfast. To this last observation Miss Ursula did not reply, as she was leaning over the parapet intent on something in the cove below. She clutched her sister's arm.

"Janet, look down there—that black thing—what is it?"

Miss Widdington's gaze followed the pointing finger.

At the foot of the rocks that edged the gorge sprawled a thing checkered black and white.

" I do believe it's a man ! "

" A drowned man ! Oh, poor fellow ! Oh, Janet, how dreadful ! "

She turned brown, compassionate eyes on her sister, who continued to peer keenly at the helpless figure below.

" Do you think he's dead, Janet ? "

" The sensible thing would be to go down and see," replied Miss Widdington.

It was by no means the first dead man cast up by the waves that they had stumbled upon during their long sojourn on this wild coast, where wrecks and founderings and loss of men's lives at sea were common-place happenings. They were dealing with the sadly familiar ; and though their gentle hearts throbbed hard as they made for the gorge and sped quickly down the ragged, rocky path, they set about their task as a matter of course.

Miss Ursula reached the sand first, and walked over to the body which lay on a low shelf of rock. Then she turned with a glad cry.

" Janet. He's alive. He's moaning. Come quickly." And, as Janet joined her : " Did you ever see such a beautiful face in your life ? "

" We should have brought some brandy," said Miss Widdington.

But, as she bent over the unconscious form, a foolish moisture gathered in her eye which had nothing to do with forgetfulness of alcohol. For indeed there lay sprawling anyhow in catlike grace beneath them the most romantic figure of a youth that the sight of maiden ladies ever rested on. He had long black hair, a perfectly chiselled face, a preposterously feminine mouth which, partly open, showed white young teeth, and the most delicate, long-fingered hands in the world. Miss Ursula murmured that he was like a young Greek god. Miss Widdington sighed. The fellow was ridiculous. He was also dank with sea water, and moaned as if he were in pain. But as gazing wrapt in wonder and admiration at young Greek gods is not much good to them when they are half-drowned, Miss Widdington despatched her sister in search of help.

" The tide is still low enough for you to get round the cliff to the village. Mrs. Pendered will give you some brandy, and her husband and Luke will bring a stretcher. You might also send Joe Gullow on his bicycle for Dr. Mead."

Miss Widdington, as behoved one who has the charge of an orphaned younger sister, did not allow the sentimental to weaken the practical. Miss Ursula, though she would have preferred to stay by the side of the beautiful youth, was docile, and went forthwith on her errand. Miss Widdington, left alone with him, rolled up her jacket and pillowed his head on it, brought his limbs into an attitude suggestive of comfort and tried by chafing to restore him to animation. Being unsuccessful in this, she at last desisted, and sat on the rocks near by and wondered who on earth he was and where in the world he came from. His garments consisted in a nondescript pair of trousers and a flannel shirt with a collar, which was fastened at the neck, not by button or stud, but by a tasselled cord ; and he was barefoot. Miss Widdington glanced modestly at his feet, which were shapely ; and the soles were soft and pink like the palms of his hands. Now, had he been the coarsest and most callosity-stricken shellback half-alive, Janet Widdington would have tended him with the same devotion ; but the lingering though unoffending Eve in her rejoiced that hands and feet betokened gentler avocations than that of sailor or fisherman. And why ? Heaven knows, save that the stranded creature had a pretty face and that his long black hair was flung over his forehead in a most interesting manner. She wished he would open his eyes. But as he kept them shut and gave no sign of returning consciousness, she sat there waiting patiently ; in front of her the rough, sun-kissed Atlantic, at her feet the semi-circular patch of golden sand, behind her the sheer white cliffs, and by her side on the slab of rock this good-looking piece of jetsam.

At length Miss Ursula appeared round the corner of the headland, followed by Jan Pendered and his son Luke carrying a stretcher. While Miss Widdington administered brandy without any obvious result, the men looked at the castaway, scratched their heads, and guessed him to be a foreigner ; but how he managed to be there alone with never a bit of wreckage to supply a clue surpassed their powers of imagination. In lifting him the right foot hung down through the trouser-leg, and his ankle was seen to be horribly black and swollen. Old Jan examined it carefully.

" Broken," said he.

" Oh, poor boy, that's why he's moaning so," cried the compassionate Miss Ursula.

The men grasped the handles of the stretcher.

"I'd better take him home to my old woman," said Jan Pendered thoughtfully.

"He can have my bed, father," said Luke.

Miss Widdington looked at Miss Ursula and Miss Ursula looked at Miss Widdington, and the eyes of each lady were wistful. Then Miss Widdington spoke.

"You can carry him up to the house, Pendered. We have a comfortable spare room, and Dorcas will help us to look after him."

The men obeyed, for in Trevannic Miss Widdington's gentle word was law.

## II

IT was early afternoon. Miss Widdington had retired to take her customary after-luncheon siesta, an indulgence permitted to her seniority, but not granted, except on rare occasions, to the young. Miss Ursula, therefore, kept watch in the sick chamber, just such a little white spotless room as their own, but containing only one little white bed in which the youth lay dry and warm and comfortably asleep. He was exhausted from cold and exposure, said the doctor who had driven in from St. Madoc, eight miles off, and his ankle was broken. The doctor had done what was necessary, had swathed him in one of old Dorcas's flannel nightgowns, and had departed. Miss Ursula had the patient all to herself. A bright fire burned in the grate, and the strong Atlantic breeze came in through the open window where she sat, her knitting in her hand. Now and then she glanced at the sleeper, longing, in a most feminine manner, for him to awake and render an account of himself. Miss Ursula's heart fluttered mildly. For beautiful youths, baffling curiosity, are not washed up alive by the sea at an old maid's feet every day in the week. It was indeed an adventure, a bit of a fairy tale suddenly gleaming and dancing in the grey atmosphere of an eventless life. She glanced at him again, and wondered whether he had a mother. Presently Dorcas came in, stout and matronly, and cast a maternal eye on the boy and smoothed his pillow. She had sons herself, and two of them had been claimed by the pitiless sea.

"It's lucky I had a sensible nightgown to give him," she remarked. "If we had had only the flimsy things that you and Miss Janet wear——"

"Sh!" said Miss Ursula, colouring faintly; "he might hear you."

Dorcas laughed and went out. Miss Ursula's needles clicked rapidly. When she glanced at the bed again she became conscious of two great dark eyes regarding her in utter wonder. She rose quickly and went over to the bed.

"Don't be afraid," she said, though what there was to terrify him in her mild demeanour and the spotless room she could not have explained; "don't be afraid, you're among friends."

He murmured some words which she did not catch.

"What do you say?" she asked sweetly.

He repeated them in a stronger voice. Then she realised that he spoke in a foreign tongue. A queer dismay filled her.

"Don't you speak English?"

He looked at her for a moment, puzzled. Then the echo of the last word seemed to reach his intelligence. He shook his head. A memory rose from schoolgirl days.

"*Parlez-vous français?*" she faltered; and when he shook his head again she almost felt relieved. Then he began to talk, regarding her earnestly, as if seeking by his mere intentness to make her understand. But it was a strange language which she had not heard before.

In one mighty effort Miss Ursula gathered together her whole stock of German.

"*Sprechen sie Deutsch?*"

"*Ach ja! Einige Worte,*" he replied, and his face lit up with a smile so radiant that Miss Ursula wondered how Providence could have neglected to inspire a being so beautiful with a knowledge of the English language. "*Ich kann mich auf deutsch verständlich machen, aber ich bin polnisch.*"

But not a word of the halting sentence could Miss Ursula make out; even the last was swallowed up in guttural unintelligibility. She only recognised the speech as German and different from that which he used at first, and which seemed to be his native tongue.

"Oh, dear, I must give it up," she sighed.

The patient moved slightly and uttered a sudden cry of pain. It occurred to Miss Ursula that he had not had time to realise the fractured ankle. That he realised it now was obvious, for he lay back with closed eyes and white lips until the spasm had

passed. After that Miss Ursula did her best to explain in pantomime what had happened. She made a gesture of swimming, then laid her cheek on her hand and simulated fainting, acted her discovery of his body on the beach, broke a wooden match in two and pointed to his ankle, exhibited the medicine bottles by the bedside, smoothed his pillow, and smiled so as to assure him of kind treatment. He understood, more or less, murmured thanks in his own language, took her hand, and to her Englishwoman's astonishment, pressed it to his lips. Miss Widdington, entering softly, found the pair in this romantic situation.

When it dawned on him a while later that he owed his deliverance equally to both of the gentle ladies, he kissed Miss Widdington's hand too. Whereupon Miss Ursula coloured and turned away. She did not like to see him kiss her sister's hand. Why, she could not tell, but she felt as if she had received a tiny stab in the heart.

## III

PROVIDENCE has showered many blessings on Trevannic, but among them is not the gift of tongues. Dr. Mead, who came over every day from St. Madoc, knew less German than the ladies. It was impossible to communicate with the boy except by signs. Old Jan Pendered, who had served in the navy in the China seas, felt confident that he could make him understand, and tried him with pidgin-English. But the youth only smiled sweetly and shook hands with him, whereupon old Jan scratched his head and acknowledged himself jiggered. To Miss Widdington, at last, came the inspiration that the oft-repeated word "*Polnisch*" meant Polish.

"You come from Poland?"

"*Aus Polen, ja*," laughed the boy.

"Kosciusko," murmured Miss Ursula.

He laughed again, delighted, and looked at her eagerly for more; but there Miss Ursula's conversation about Poland ended. If the discovery of his nationality lay to the credit of her sister, she it was who found out his name, Andrea Marowski, and taught him to say: "Miss Ursula." She also taught him the English names of the various objects around him. And here the innocent rivalry of the two ladies began to take definite form. Miss Widdington, without taking counsel of Miss Ursula, borrowed an old Otto's German grammar from the girls' school at St. Madoc, and, by means of patient research, put to him such questions as: "Have you a mother?" "How old are you?" and, collating his written replies with the information vouchsafed by the grammar, succeeded in discovering, among other biographical facts, that he was alone in the world, save for an old uncle who lived in Cracow, and that he was twenty years of age. So that when Miss Ursula boasted that she had taught him to say: "Good morning. How do you do?" Miss Widdington could cry with an air of triumph: "He told me that he doesn't suffer from toothache."

It was one of the curious features of the ministrations which they afforded Mr. Andrea Marowski alternately, that Miss Ursula would have nothing whatever to do with Otto's German grammar and Miss Widdington scorned the use of English and made as little use of sign language as possible.

"I don't think it becoming, Ursula," she said, "to indicate hunger by opening your mouth and rubbing the front of your waist, like a cannibal."

Miss Ursula accepted the rebuke meekly, for she never returned a pert answer to her senior; but reflecting that Janet's disapproval might possibly arise from her want of skill in the art of pantomime, she went away comforted and continued her unbecoming practices. The conversations, however, that the ladies, each in her own way, managed to have with the invalid, were sadly limited in scope. No means that they could devise could bring them enlightenment on many interesting points. Who he was, whether noble or peasant, how he came to be lying like a jellyfish on the slab of rock in their cove, coatless and barefoot, remained as great a puzzle as ever. Of course he informed them, especially the grammar-equipped Miss Widdington, over and over again in his execrable German; but they grew no wiser, and at last they abandoned in despair their attempts to solve these mysteries. They contented themselves with the actual, which indeed was enough to absorb their simple minds. There he was cast up by the sea or fallen from the moon, young, gay, and helpless, a veritable gift of the gods. The very mystery of his adventure invested him with a curious charm; and then the prodigious appetite with which he began to devour fish and eggs

and chickens formed of itself a joy hitherto undreamed of in their philosophy.

"When he gets up he must have some clothes," said Miss Widdington.

Miss Ursula agreed; but did not say that she was knitting him socks in secret. Andrea's interest in the progress of these garments was one of her chief delights.

"There's the trunk upstairs with our dear father's things," said Miss Widdington with more diffidence than usual. "They are so sacred to us that I was wondering—"

"Our dear father would be the first to wish it," said Miss Ursula.

"It's a Christian's duty to clothe the naked," said Miss Widdington.

"And so we must clothe him in what we've got," said Miss Ursula. Then with a slight flush she added: "It's so many years since our great loss that I've almost forgotten what a man wears."

"I haven't," said Miss Widdington. "I think I ought to tell you, Ursula," she continued, after pausing to put sugar and milk into the cup of tea which she handed to her sister—they were at the breakfast table, at the head of which she formally presided, as she had done since her emancipation from the schoolroom—"I think I ought to tell you that I have decided to devote my twenty-five pounds to buying him an outfit. Our dear father's things can only be a makeshift—and the poor boy hasn't a penny in the pockets he came ashore in."

Now, some three years before, an aunt had bequeathed Miss Widdington a tiny legacy, the disposal of which had been a continuous subject of grave discussion between the sisters. She always alluded to it as "my twenty-five pounds."

"Is that quite fair, dear?" said Miss Ursula impulsively.

"Fair? Do you mind explaining?"

Miss Ursula regretted her impetuosity. "Don't you think, dear Janet," she said with some nervousness, "that it would lay him under too great an obligation to you personally? I should prefer to take the money out of our joint income. We both are responsible for him and," she added with a timid smile, "I found him first."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," Miss Widdington retorted with a quite unusual touch of acidity. "But if you feel strongly about it, I am willing to withdraw my five-and-twenty pounds."

"You're not angry with me, Janet?"

"Angry? Of course not," Miss Widdington replied freezingly. "Don't be silly. And why aren't you eating your bacon?"

This was the first shadow of dissension that had arisen between them since their childhood. On the way to the sick-room, Miss Ursula shed a few tears over Janet's hectoring ways, and Miss Widdington, in pursuit of her housekeeping duties, made Dorcas the scapegoat for Ursula's unreasonableness. Before luncheon time they kissed with mutual apologies; but the spirit of rivalry was by no means quenched.

## IV

ONE afternoon Miss Janet had an inspiration.

"If I played the piano in the drawing-room with the windows open you could hear it in the spare room quite plainly."

"If you think it would disturb Mr. Andrea," said Miss Ursula, "you might shut the windows."

"I was proposing to offer him a distraction, dear," said Miss Widdington. "These foreign gentlemen are generally fond of music."

Miss Ursula could raise no objection, but her heart sank. She could not play the piano.

She took her seat cheerfully, however, by the bed, which had been wheeled up to the window, so that the patient could look out on the glory of sky and sea, took her knitting from a drawer and began to turn the heel of one of the sacred socks. Andrea watched her lazily and contentedly. Perhaps he had never seen two such soft-treaded, soft-fingered ladies in lavender in his life. He often tried to give some expression to his gratitude, and the hand-kissing had become a thrice daily custom. For Miss Widdington he had written the word "Engel," which the vocabulary at the end of Otto's German grammar rendered as "Angel"; whereat she had blushed quite prettily. For Miss Ursula he had drawn, very badly, but still unmistakably, the picture of a winged denizen of Paradise, and she, too, had treasured the compliment; she also treasured the drawing. Now, Miss Ursula held up the knitting, which began distinctly to indicate the shape of a sock, and smiled. Andrea smiled, too, and blew her a kiss with his fingers. He had many

graceful foreign gestures. The doctor, who was a plain, bullet-headed Briton, disapproved of Andrea and expressed to Dorcas his opinion that the next things to be washed ashore would be the young man's monkey and organ. This was sheer prejudice, for Andrea's manners were unexceptionable, and his smile, in the eyes of his hostesses, the most attractive thing in the world.

"Heel," said Miss Ursula.

"'Eel," repeated Andrea.

"Wool," said Miss Ursula.

"Vool," said Andrea.

"No—wo-o," said Miss Ursula, puffing out her lips so as to accentuate the "w."

"Wo-o," said Andrea, doing the same. And then they both burst out laughing. They were enjoying themselves mightily.

Then, from the drawing-room below, came the tinkling sound of the old untuned piano which had remained unopened for many years. It was the "Spring Song" of Mendelssohn, played, schoolgirl fashion, with uncertain fingers that now and then struck false notes. The light died away from Andrea's face, and he looked inquiringly, if not wonderingly, at Miss Ursula. She smiled encouragement, pointed first at the floor, and then at him, thereby indicating that the music was for his benefit. For awhile he remained quite patient. At last he clapped his hands on his ears, and, his features distorted with pain, cried out:

*"Nein, nein, nein, das lieb' ich nicht! Es ist hässlich!"*

In eager pantomime he besought her to stop the entertainment. Miss Ursula went downstairs, hating to hurt her sister's feelings, yet unable to crush a wicked, unregenerate feeling of pleasure.

"I am so sorry, dear Janet," she said, laying her hand on her sister's arm, "but he doesn't like music. It's astonishing, his dislike. It makes him quite violent."

Miss Widdington ceased playing and accompanied her sister upstairs. Andrea, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders, reached out his two hands to the musician and, taking hers, kissed her finger-tips. Miss Widdington consulted Otto.

*"Lieben Sie nicht Musik?"*

*"Ja wohl,"* he cried, and, laughing, played an imaginary fiddle.

"He *does* like music," cried Miss Widdington.

"How can you make such silly mistakes, Ursula? Only he prefers the violin."

Miss Ursula grew downcast for a moment; then she brightened. A brilliant idea occurred to her.

"Adam Penruddocke. He has a fiddle. We can ask him to come up after tea and play to us."

She reassured Andrea in her queer sign-language, and later in the afternoon Adam Penruddocke, a sheepish giant of a fisherman, was shown into the room. He bowed to the ladies, shook the long white hand proffered him by the beautiful youth, tuned up, and played "The Carnival of Venice" from start to finish. Andrea regarded him with mischievous, laughing eyes, and at the end he applauded vigorously.

Miss Widdington turned to her sister.

"I knew he liked music," she said.

"Shall I play something else, sir?" asked Penruddocke.

Andrea, guessing his meaning, beckoned him to approach the bed, and took the violin and bow from his hands. He looked at the instrument critically, smiled to himself, tuned it afresh, and with an air of intense happiness drew the bow across the strings.

"Why, he can play it!" cried Miss Ursula.

Andrea laughed and nodded, and played a bit of "The Carnival of Venice" as it ought to be played, with gaiety and mischief. Then he broke off, and after two or three tearing chords that made his hearers start, plunged into a wild czardas. The ladies looked at him in open-mouthed astonishment as the mad music such as they had never heard in their lives before filled the little room with its riot and devilry. Penruddocke stood and panted, his eyes staring out of his head. When Andrea had finished there was a bewildered silence. He nodded pleasantly at his audience, delighted at the effect he had produced. Then, with an artist's malice, he went to the other extreme of emotion. He played a sobbing folk-song, rending the heart with cries of woe and desolation and broken hopes. It clutched at the heartstrings, turning them into vibrating chords; it pierced the soul with its poignant despair; it ended in a long-drawn-out note high up in the treble, whose pain became intolerable; and the end was greeted with a sharp gasp of relief. The white lips of the ruddy giant quivered. Tears streamed down the cheeks of Miss Widdington and Miss Ursula. Again there was silence, but this time it was broken by a clear, shrill voice outside.

"Encore! Encore!"

The sisters looked at one another. Who had dared intrude at such a moment? Miss Widdington went to the window to see.

## V

IN the garden stood a young woman of independent bearing, with a palette and brushes in her hand. An easel was pitched a few yards beyond the gate. Miss Widdington regarded this young woman with marked disfavour. The girl calmly raised her eyes.

"I apologise for trespassing like this," she said, "but I simply couldn't resist coming nearer to this marvellous violin-playing—and my exclamation came out almost unconsciously."

"You are quite welcome to listen," said Miss Widdington stiffly.

"May I ask who is playing it?"

Miss Widdington almost gasped at the girl's impertinence. The latter laughed frankly.

"I ask because it seems as if it could only be one of the big, well-known people."

"It's a young friend who is staying with us," said Miss Widdington.

"I beg your pardon," said the girl. "But, you see my brother is Boris Danilof, the violinist, so I've that excuse for being interested."

"I don't think Mr. Andrea can play any more to-day," said Miss Ursula from her seat by the bed. "He's tired."

Miss Widdington repeated this information to Miss Danilof, who bade her good afternoon and withdrew to her easel.

"A most forward, objectionable girl," exclaimed Miss Widdington. "And who is Boris Danilof, I should like to know?"

If she had but understood German, Andrea could have told her. He caught at the name of the world-famous violinist and bent eagerly forward in great excitement.

"Boris Danilof? *Ist er unten?*"

"*Nicht*—I mean *Nein*," replied Miss Widdington, proud at not having to consult Otto.

Andrea sank back, disappointed, on his pillow.

However much Miss Widdington disapproved of the young woman, and however little the sisters knew of Boris Danilof, it was obvious that they were harbouring a remarkable violinist. That even the bullet-headed doctor, who had played the double bass in his Hospital Orchestral Society and was, therefore, an authority, freely admitted. It gave the romantic youth a new and somewhat awe-inspiring value in the eyes of the ladies. He was a genius, said Miss Ursula—and her imagination became touched by the magic of the word. As he grew stronger he played more. His fame spread through the village and he gave recitals to crowded audiences—as many fisher-folk as could be squeezed into the little bedroom, and more standing in the garden below. Miss Danilof did not come again. The ladies learned that she was staying in the next village, Polwern, two or three miles off. In their joy at Andrea's recovery they forgot her existence.

Happy days came when he could rise from bed and hobble about on a crutch, attired in the quaint garments of Captain Widdington, R.N., who had died twenty years before, at the age of seventy-three. They added to his romantic appearance, giving him the air of the *jeune premier* in costume drama. There was a blue waistcoat with gilt buttons, calculated to win any feminine approval. The ladies admired him vastly. Conversation was still difficult, as Miss Ursula had succeeded in teaching him very little English, and Miss Widdington, after a desperate grapple with Otto on her own account, had given up the German language in despair. But what matters the tongue when the heart speaks? And the hearts of Miss Widdington and Miss Ursula spoke; delicately, timidly, tremulously, in the whisper of an evening breeze, in undertones, it is true—yet they spoke all the same. The first walks on the heather of their cliff in the pure spring sunshine were rare joys. As they had done with their watches by his bedside, they took it in turns to walk with him; and each in her turn of solitude felt little pricklings of jealousy. But as each had instituted with him her own particular dainty relations and confidences—Miss Widdington more maternal, Miss Ursula more sisterly—to which his artistic nature responded involuntarily, each felt sure that she was the one who had gained his especial affection.

Thus they wove their gossamer webs of romance in the secret recess of their souls. What they hoped for was as dim and vague as their concept of heaven, and as pure. They looked only at the near future—a circle of light encompassed by mists; but

in the circle stood ever the beloved figure. They could not imagine him out of it. He would stay with them, irradiating their lives with his youth and his gaiety, playing to them his divine music, kissing their hands, until he grew quite strong and well again. And that was a long, long way off. Meanwhile life was a perpetual spring. Why should it ever end?

One afternoon they sat in the sunny garden, the ladies busy with needlework, and Andrea playing snatches of dreamy things on the violin. The dainty remains of tea stood on a table, and the young man's crutch rested against it. Presently he began to play Tschaikowsky's "Chanson Triste." Miss Ursula, looking up, saw a girl of plain face and independent bearing standing by the gate.

"Who is that, Janet?" she whispered.

Miss Janet glanced round.

"It is the impertinent young woman who was listening the other day."

Andrea followed their glances, and, perceiving a third listener, half consciously played to her. When the piece was finished the girl slowly walked away.

"I know it's wrong and unchristianlike," said Miss Widdington, "but I dislike that girl intensely."

"So do I," said Miss Ursula. Then she laughed. "She looks like the wicked fairy in a story-book."

## VI

THE time came when he threw aside his crutch and flew, laughing, away beyond their control. This they did not mind, for he always came back and accompanied them on their wild rambles. He now resembled the ordinary young man of the day as nearly as the St. Madoc tailors and hosiers could contrive; and the astonishing fellow, with his cameo face and his hyacinthine locks, still looked picturesque.

One morning he took Penruddocke's fiddle and went off, in high spirits, and when he returned in the late afternoon his face was flushed and a new light burned in his eyes. He explained his adventures volubly. They had a vague impression that, Orion-like, he had been playing his stringed instrument to dolphins and waves and things some miles off along the coast. To please him they said "*Ja*" at every pause in his narration, and he thought they understood. Finally he kissed their hands.

Two mornings later he started, without his fiddle, immediately after breakfast. To Miss Ursula, who accompanied him down the road to the village, he announced Polwern as his destination. Unsuspecting and happy, she bade him good-bye and lovingly watched his lithe young figure disappear behind the bounding cliff of the little bay.

Miss Olga Danilof sat reading a novel by the door of the cottage where she lodged when the beautiful youth came up. He raised his hat—she nodded.

"Well," she said in German, "have you told the funny old maids?"

"*Ach*," said he, "they are dear, gracious ladies—but I have told them."

"I've heard from my brother," she remarked, taking a letter from the book. "He trusts my judgment implicitly, as I said he would—and you are to come with me to London at once."

"To-day?"

"By the midday train."

He looked at her in amazement. "But the dear ladies——"

"You can write and explain. My brother's time is valuable—he has already put off his journey to Paris one day in order to see you."

"But I have no money," he objected weakly.

"What does that matter? I have enough for the railway ticket, and when you see Boris he will give you an advance. Oh, don't be grateful," she added in her independent way. "In the first place, we're brother artists, and in the second it's a pure matter of business. It's much better to put yourself in the hands of Boris Danilof and make a fortune in Europe than to play in a restaurant orchestra in New York; don't you think so?"

Andrea did think so, and he blessed the storm that drove the ship out of its course from Hamburg and terrified him out of his wits in his steerage quarters, so that he rushed on deck in shirt and trousers, grasping a life-belt, only to be cursed one moment by a sailor and the next to be swept by a wave clean over the taffrail into the sea. He blessed the storm and he blessed the wave and he blessed the life-belt which he lost just before consciousness left him; and he blessed the jag of rock on the sandy cove against which he must have broken his ankle; and he blessed the ladies and the

(*Continued on page 142*)

# The terrors of Sleepless Nights

THE slightest noise—a creaking stair—and your heart beats so violently that you wonder the whole household does not hear it.

Could anything more effectively rob you of health and happiness than the horrors of insomnia? Your nerves are frayed and exhausted—starved for lack of nerve-restoring nourishment. Avoid drugs. Natural sleep comes only from feeding the nerves.

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*The larger tins are more economical to purchase.*

P 430

sun and the sea and sky and Olga Danilof and the whole of this beautiful world that had suddenly laid itself at his feet.

The village cart drew up by the door, and Miss Danilof's luggage that lay ready in the hall was lifted in.

"Come," she said. "You can ask the old maids to send on your things."

He laughed. "I have no things. I am as free as the wind."

At St. Madoc, whence he intended to send a telegram to the dear, gracious ladies, they only had just time to catch the train. He sent no telegram; and as they approached London he thought less and less about it, his mind, after the manner of youth, full of the wonder that was to be.

The ladies sat down to tea. Eggs were ready to be boiled as soon as he returned. Not having lunched, he would be hungry. But he did not come. By dinner-time they grew anxious. They postponed the meal. Dorcas came into the drawing-room periodically to report deterioration of cooked viands. But they could not eat the meal alone. At last they grew terrified lest some evil should have befallen him, and Miss Widdington went into the village and despatched Jan Pendered and Joe Gullow on his bicycle in search. When she returned she found Miss Ursula looking as if she had seen a ghost.

"Janet, that girl is living there."

"Where?"

"Polwern. He went there this morning."

Miss Widdington felt as if a cold hand had touched her heart, but she knew that it behoved her as the elder to dismiss her sister's fears.

"You're talking nonsense, Ursula; he has never met her."

"How do we know?" urged Miss Ursula.

"I don't consider it delicate," replied Miss Widdington, "to discuss the possibility."

They said no more, and went out and stood by the gate, waiting for their messengers. The moon rose and silvered the sea, and the sea breeze sprang up; the surf broke in a melancholy rhythm on the sands beneath.

"It sounds like the 'Chanson Triste,'" said Miss Ursula. And before them both rose the picture of the girl standing there like an Evil Fairy while Andrea played.

At last Jan Pendered appeared on the cliff. The ladies went out to meet him.

Then they learned what had happened.

In a dignified way they thanked Jan Pendered and gave him a shilling for Joe Gullow, who had brought the news. They bade him good night in clear, brave voices, and walked back very silent and upright through the garden into the house. In the drawing-room they turned to each other, and, their arms about each other's necks, they broke down utterly.

The stranger woman had come and had taken him away from them. Youth had flown magnetically to youth. They were left alone unheeded in the dry lavender of their lives.

The moonlight streamed through the white-curtained casement window into the white, spotless room. It shone on the two little white beds, on the white garments, neatly folded on white chairs, on the white-whiskered gentleman over the mantelpiece, and on the white faces of the sisters. They slept little that night. Once Miss Widdington spoke.

"Ursula, we must go to sleep and forget it all. We've been two old fools."

Miss Ursula sobbed for answer. With the dawn came a certain quietude of spirit. She rose, put on her dressing-gown, and, leaving her sister asleep, stole out on tiptoe. The window was open and the curtains were undrawn in the boy's empty room. She leaned on the sill and looked out over the sea. Sooner or later, she knew, would come a letter of explanation. She hoped Janet would not force her to read it. She no longer wanted to know whence he came, whither he was going. It were better for her, she thought, not to know. It were better for her to cherish the most beautiful thing that had ever entered her life. For all those years she had waited for the prince who never came; and he had come at last out of fairyland, cast up by the sea. She had had with him her brief season of tremulous happiness. If he had been carried off, against his will, by the strange woman into the unknown whence he had emerged, it was only the inevitable ending of such a fairy tale.

Thus wisdom came to her from sea and sky. She smiled through her tears, and she, the weaker, went forth for the first time in her life to comfort and direct her sister.

# TRILBY

## By GEORGE DU MAURIER

**Trilby O'Ferral is an artists' model of loving and magnetic personality. The Laird, Taffy and Little Billee, students of the Quartier Latin, welcome her to their studio, and it is here that Svengali, a German musician of repulsive appearance, meets her and obtains sway over her by his magnetic powers.**

**Little Billee falls seriously in love with Trilby, but, overcome with horror of her former life, gives him up. Her refusal to marry him causes Little Billee to fall ill. He goes to England, but in five years returns to Paris with former friends—having won great fame as an artist.**

**The trio attend a concert where La Svengali, the world's Prima Donna, is to sing. To their intense astonishment the three friends realise that the great singer is—Trilby.**

**Later, Trilby comes to London, where, at her first concert, Svengali dies and she loses her memory. She is cared for by Taffy and Marta, an old relative of Svengali. Tributes from her admirers reach her from all over the world, but nothing rouses her. One evening she tells her friends the story of her life, but not a word of her experience with Svengali escapes her lips. It is as though that part of her life had never been.**

LATE on one memorable Saturday afternoon, just as it was getting dusk in Charlotte Street, Trilby, in her pretty blue dressing-gown, lay on the sofa by the fire—her head well propped, her knees drawn up—looking very placid and content.

She had spent the early part of the day dictating her will to the conscientious Taffy.

It was a simple document, although she was not without many valuable trinkets to leave, quite a fortune! Souvenirs from many men and women she had charmed by her singing, from royalties downwards.

She had been looking them over with the faithful Marta, to whom she had always thought they belonged. It was explained to her that they were gifts of Svengali's; since she did not remember when and where and by whom they were presented to her, except a few that Svengali had given her himself, with many passionate expressions of his love, which seems to have been deep and constant and sincere; none the less so, perhaps, that she could never return it!

She had left the bulk of these to the faithful Marta.

But to each of the *trois Angliches* she had bequeathed a beautiful ring, which was to be worn by their brides if they ever married, and the brides didn't object.

To Mrs. Bagot she left a pearl necklace, to Miss Bagot her gold coronet of stars; and pretty (and most costly) gifts to each of the three doctors who had attended her and been so assiduous in their care; and who, as she was told, would make no charge for attending on Madame Svengali. And studs and scarf-pins to Antony, Lorrimer, the Greek, Dodor, and Zouzou; and to Carnegie a little German-silver vinaigrette which had once belonged to Lord Witlow; and pretty souvenirs to the Vinards, Angèle Boisse, Durien and others.

And she left a magnificent gold watch and chain to Gecko, with a most affectionate letter and a hundred pounds—which was all she had in money of her own.

She had taken great interest in discussing with Taffy the particular kind of trinket which would best suit the idiosyncrasy of each particular legatee, and derived great comfort from the businesslike and sympathetic conscientiousness with which the good Taffy entered upon all these minutiæ—he was so solemn and serious about it, and took such pains. She little guessed how his dumb but deeply feeling heart was harrowed!

This document had been duly signed and witnessed and entrusted to his care; and Trilby lay tranquil and happy, and with a sense that nothing remained for her but to enjoy the fleeting hour and make the most of each precious moment as it went by.

She was quite without pain of either mind or body, and surrounded by the people she adored—Taffy, the Laird and Little Billee, and Mrs. Bagot and Marta, who sat knitting in a corner, with her black mittens on and her brass spectacles.

She listened to the chat and joined in it,

laughing as usual; "love in her eyes sat playing" as she looked from one to another, for she loved them all beyond expression. "Love on her lips was straying and warbling in her breath," whenever she spoke, and her weakened voice was still larger, fuller, softer than any other voice in the room, in the world—of another kind, from another sphere.

A cart drove up, there was a ring at the door, and presently a wooden packing-case was brought into the room.

At Trilby's request it was opened, and found to contain a large photograph, framed and glazed, of Svengali, in the military uniform of his own Hungarian band (which he had always worn until he came to Paris and London, where he conducted in ordinary evening dress), and looking straight out of the picture, straight at you. He was standing by his desk with his left hand turning over a leaf of music, and waving his bâton with his right. It was a splendid photograph, by a Viennese photographer, and a most speaking likeness; and Svengali looked truly fine—all made up of importance and authority, and his big black eyes were full of stern command.

Marta trembled as she looked. It was handed to Trilby, who exclaimed in surprise. She had never seen it. She had no photograph of him, and had never possessed one.

No message of any kind, no letter of explanation accompanied this unexpected present, which, from the postmarks on the case, seemed to have travelled all over Europe to London, out of some remote province in eastern Russia—out of the mysterious East! The poisonous East—birthplace and home of an ill wind that blows nobody good.

Trilby laid it against her legs as on a lectern, and lay gazing at it with close attention for a long time, making a casual remark now and then, as, "He was very handsome, I think"; or, "That uniform becomes him very well. Why has he got it on, I wonder?"

The others went on talking, and Mrs. Bagot made coffee.

Presently Mrs. Bagot took a cup of coffee to Trilby, and found her still staring intently at the portrait, but with her eyes dilated, and quite a strange light in them.

"Trilby, Trilby, your coffee! What is the matter, Trilby?"

Trilby was smiling, with fixed eyes, and made no answer.

¶

THE others got up and gathered round her in some alarm. Marta seemed terror-stricken, and wished to snatch the photograph away, but was prevented from doing so; one didn't know what the consequences might be.

Taffy rang the bell, and sent a servant for Dr. Thorne, who lived close by, in Fitzroy Square.

Presently Trilby began to speak, quite softly, in French: "Encore une fois? bon! je veux bien! avec la voix blanche alors, n'est-ce pas? et puis foncer au milieu. Et pas trop vite en commençant! Battez bien la mesure, Svengali—que je puisse bien voir—car il fait déjà nuit! c'est ça! Allons, Gecko—donne-moi le ton!"

Then she smiled, and seemed to beat time softly by moving her head a little from side to side, her eyes intent on Svengali's in the portrait, and suddenly she began to sing Chopin's Impromptu in A flat.

She hardly seemed to breathe as the notes came pouring out, without words—mere vocalising. It was as if breath were unnecessary for so little voice as she was using, though there was enough of it to fill the room—to fill the house—to drown her small audience in holy, heavenly sweetness.

She was a consummate mistress of her art. How that could be seen! And also how splendid had been her training. It all seemed as easy to her as opening and shutting her eyes, and yet how utterly impossible to anybody else!

Between wonder, enchantment and alarm they were frozen to statues—all except Marta, who ran out of the room crying: "Gott im Himmel! wieder zurück! weider zurück!"

She sang it just as she had sung it at the Salle des Bashibazoucks, only it sounded still more ineffably seductive, as she was using less voice—using the essence of her voice in fact—the pure spirit, the very cream of it.

There can be little doubt that these four watchers by that enchanted couch were listening to not only the most divinely beautiful, but also the most astounding

(Continued on page 146.)

# *A Guide to Good Reading*

T.P.'S WEEKLY is an inspiring and instructive journal of everything that matters in life and letters of to-day—a kindly guide to richer and fuller knowledge. It will tell you what to read and when to read it. Leaders of modern thought, famous writers and great publicists all contribute to its pages. It is a paper of the highest educational value. Buy it regularly.

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# POPULAR GARDENING

*Every Saturday—2d.*

**Buy It Regularly**

feat of musical utterance ever heard out of a human throat.

The usual effect was produced. Tears were streaming down the cheeks of Mrs. Bagot and Little Billee. Tears were in the Laird's eyes, a tear on one of Taffy's whiskers—tears of sheer delight.

When she came back to the quick movement again, after the adagio, her voice grew louder and shriller, and sweet with a sweetness not of this earth ; and went on increasing in volume as she quickened the time, nearing the end ; and then came the dying away into all but nothing—a mere melodic breath ; and then the little soft chromatic ascending rocket, up to E in alt, the last parting caress (which Svengali had introduced as a finale, for it does not exist in the piano score).

When it was over she said : " Ca y est-il, cette fois, Svengali ? Ah, tant mieux, à la fin ! c'est pas malheureux ! Et maintenant, mon ami, *je suis fatiguée—bon soir !* "

Her head fell back on the pillow, and she lay fast asleep.

Mrs. Bagot took the portrait away gently. Little Billee knelt down and held Trilby's hand in his and felt for her pulse, and could not find it.

He said : " Trilby ! Trilby ! " and put his ear to her mouth to hear her breathe. Her breath was inaudible.

But soon she folded her hands across her breast, and uttered a little short sigh, and in a weak voice said : " *Svengali . . . Svengali . . . Svengali . . .*"

They remained in silence round her for several minutes, terror-stricken.

The doctor came ; he put his hand to her heart, his ear to her lips. He turned up one of her eyelids and looked at her eye. And then, his voice quivering with strong emotion, he stood up and said : " Madame Svengali's trials and sufferings are all over ! "

" Oh, good God, is she *dead* ? " cried Mrs. Bagot.

" Yes, Mrs. Bagot. She has been dead several minutes—perhaps a quarter of an hour."

¶

PORTHOS-ATHOS, *alias* Taffy Wynne, is sitting to breakfast (opposite his wife) at a little table in the courtyard of that huge caravansérai on the Boulevard des Capucines, Paris, where he had sat more than twenty years ago with the Laird and Little Billee ; where, in fact, he had pulled Svengali's nose.

Little is changed in the aspect of the place : the same cosmopolite company, with more of the American element, perhaps ; the same arrivals and departures in railway omnibuses, cabs, hired carriages ; and, airing his calves on the marble steps, stood just such another colossal and beautiful old man in black cloth coat and knee-breeches and silk stockings as of yore, with probably the very same pinchbeck chain. Where do they breed these magnificent old Frenchmen ? In Germany, perhaps, " where all the good big waiters come from ! "

And also the same fine weather. It is always fine weather in the courtyard of the Grand Hôtel. As the Laird would say, they manage these things better there !

Taffy wears a short beard, which is turning grey. His kind blue eye is no longer choleric, but mild and friendly—as frank as ever ; and full of humorous patience. He has grown stouter ; he is very big indeed, in all three dimensions, but the symmetry and the gainliness of the athlete belong to him still in movement and repose ; and his clothes fit him beautifully, though they are not new, and show careful beating and brushing and ironing, and even a faint suspicion of all but imperceptible fine-drawing here and there.

What a magnificent old man *he* will make some day, should the Grand Hôtel ever run short of them ! He looks as if he could be trusted down to the ground—in all things, little or big ; as if his word were as good as his bond, and even better ; his wink as good as his word, his nod as good as his wink ; and, in truth, as he looks, so he is.

The most cynical disbeliever in " the grand old name of gentleman," and its virtues as a noun of definition, would almost be justified in quite dogmatically asserting at sight, and without even being introduced, that, at all events, Taffy is a " gentleman," inside and out, up and down—from the crown of his head (which is getting rather bald) to the sole of his foot (by no means a small one).

Indeed, this is always the first thing people say of Taffy—and the last. It means, perhaps, that he may be a trifle dull. Well, one can't be everything !

(*Continued on page* 148)

# Everything Seemed a Burden

## *"Until I Started Kruschen."*

*"For three years I have suffered from constipation, depression and nerves which made everything seem a burden. I was advised to go away, which I did for some weeks this year. Feeling improved I commenced to take Kruschen, and from then I gradually got back to my usual state of health. I have now resumed my duties, and work is once more a pleasure. I am continuing with the Salts, and after being back at business nearly six weeks am maintaining the "Kruschen feeling." "*

*D. C., London.*

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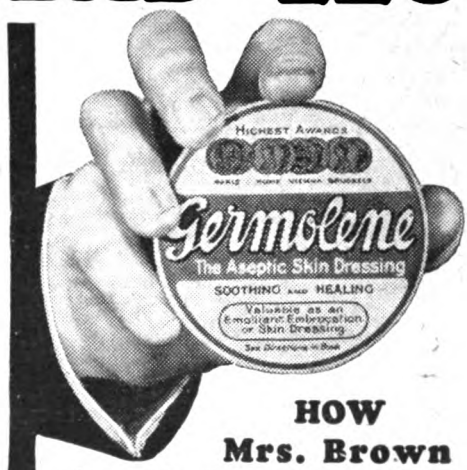
# BAD LEG




## HOW Mrs. Brown heard of Germolene— and how she was cured!

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# Germolene

*The new-day Aseptic Skin Dressing*

**1/3 per tin from all Chemists**

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Porthos was a trifle dull—and so was Athos, I think; and likewise his son, the faithful Viscount of Bragelonne—*bon chien chasse de race!* And so was Wilfred of Ivanhoe, the disinherited; and Edgar, the Lord of Ravenswood, and so, for that matter, was Colonel Newcome, of immortal memory!

Yet who does not love them—who would not wish to be like them, for better, for worse!

Taffy's wife is unlike Taffy in many ways; but (fortunately for both) very like him in some. She is a little woman, very well shaped, very dark, with black, wavy hair, and very small hands and feet; a very graceful, handsome and vivacious person; by no means dull; full, indeed, of quick perceptions and intuitions; deeply interested in all that is going on about and around her, and with always lots to say about it, but not too much.

She distinctly belongs to the rare and ever-blessed and most precious race of charmers.

She had fallen in love with the stalwart Taffy more than a quarter of a century ago in the Place St. Anatole des Arts, where he and she and her mother had tended the sick couch of Little Billee—but she had never told her love. *Tout vient à point, à qui sait attendre!*

That is a capital proverb, and sometimes even a true one. Blanche Bagot had found it to be both!

One terrible night, never to be forgotten, Taffy lay fast asleep in bed, at his rooms in Jermyn Street, for he was very tired; grief tires more than anything, and brings a deeper slumber.

That day he had followed Trilby to her last home in Kensal Green, with Little Billee, Mrs. Bagot, the Laird, Antony, the Greek, and Durien (who had come over from Paris on purpose) as chief mourners; and very many other people, noble, famous, or otherwise, English and foreign; a splendid and most representative gathering, as was duly chronicled in all the newspapers here and abroad; a fitting ceremony with which to close the brief but splendid career of the greatest pleasure-giver of our time.

He was awakened by a tremendous ringing at the street-door bell, as if the house were on fire; and then there was a hurried scrambling up in the dark, a tumbling over stairs and kicking against banisters, and Little Billee had burst into his room, calling out: "Oh, Taffy, Taffy! I'm g-going mad—I'm g-going m-mad! I'm d-d-done for. . . ."

"All right, old fellow—just wait till I strike a light!"

"Oh, Taffy! I haven't slept for four nights—not a wink! She d-d-died with Sv—Sv—Sv . . . damn it, I can't get it out!—that ruffian's name on her lips! . . . it was just as if he were calling her from the t-t-tomb! She recovered her senses the very minute she saw his photograph—she was so f-fond of him she f-forgot everybody else! She's gone straight to him, after all—in some other life! . . . to slave for him, and sing for him, and help him to make better music than ever! Oh, T—T—oh—oh! Taffy—oh, oh, oh! Catch hold! C-c-catch . . ." And Little Billee had all but fallen on the floor in a fit.

¶

AND all the old miserable business of five years before had begun over again!

There has been too much sickness in this story, so I will tell as little as possible of poor Little Billee's long illness, his slow and only partial recovery, the paralysis of his powers as a painter, his quick decline, his early death, his manly, calm and most beautiful surrender—the wedding of the moth with the star, of the night with the morrow!

For all but blameless as his short life had been, and so full of splendid promise and performance, nothing ever became him better than the way he left it. It was as if he were starting on some distant holy quest, like some gallant knight of old—"A Bagot to the rescue!" in another life. It shook the infallibility of a certain vicar down to its very foundations, and made him think more deeply about things than he had ever thought yet. It gave him pause! . . . and so wrung his heart that when, at the last, he stooped to kiss his poor young dead friend's pure white forehead, he dropped a bigger tear on it than Little Billee (once so given to the dropping of big tears) had ever dropped in his life.

But it is all too sad to write about.

It was by Little Billee's bedside, in Devonshire, that Taffy had grown to love Blanche Bagot, and not very many weeks after it was all over that Taffy had asked

(*Continued on page 150*)

# Corns

## *Gone for Good.*

*"Some six months ago I tried Radox Bath Salts for the first time. I had a corn on which I had tried almost every corn remedy to no purpose. I have purposely refrained from writing to you immediately as I wanted to make sure that the cure was likely to be permanent. I am glad to tell you it is. Before I had used half the first packet of Radox the brute had gone, and I haven't felt the slightest trace of it since."*

*H. W. A., Northants.*
*18th September, 1927.*

When you put your feet into a footbath containing Radox, the salts soften the hard outer layers of the corn, and the oxygen penetrates right to the root of the corn, which is thus loosened so that it may be lifted out bodily.

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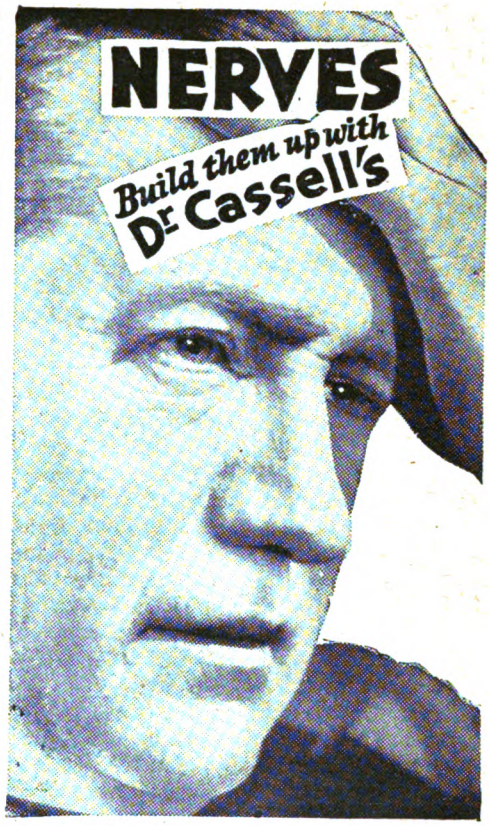


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## *Dr. Cassell's soon cured*

*Mr. T. Boyes, of 10, Nook Lane, Sutton Oak, St. Helens, writes :—"Owing to my war experience in India and Mespot my nerves were completely shattered. After trying all sorts of other remedies without avail, I decided to give Dr. Cassell's Tablets a trial. After the first box, I felt a difference, and now I am completely cured, thanks to Dr. Cassell's."*

*That is what they will do for you. Start a course of Dr. Cassell's to-day.*

# DR. CASSELL'S

**TABLETS**

**1/3 & 3/- per box**

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her to be his wife ; and in a year they were married, and a very happy marriage it turned out—the one thing that poor Mrs. Bagot still looks upon as a compensation for all the griefs and troubles of her life.

During the first year or two Blanche had perhaps been the most ardently loving of this well-assorted pair. That beautiful look of love surprised (which makes all women's eyes look the same) came into hers whenever she looked at Taffy, and filled his heart with tender compunction, and a queer sense of his own unworthiness.

Then a boy was born to them, and that look fell on the boy, and the good Taffy caught it as it passed him by, and he felt a helpless, absurd jealousy, that was none the less painful for being so ridiculous, and then that look fell on another boy, and yet another, so that it was through these boys that she looked at their father. Then *his* eyes caught the look, and kept it for their own use ; and he grew never to look at his wife without it ; and as no daughter came, she retained for life the monopoly of that most sweet and expressive regard.

They are not very rich. He is a far better sportsman than he will ever be a painter ; and if he doesn't sell his pictures it is not because they are too good for the public taste : indeed, he has no illusions on that score himself, even if his wife has ! He is quite the least conceited art-duffer I ever met—and I have met many far worse duffers than Taffy.

Would only that I might kill off his cousin, Sir Oscar, and Sir Oscar's five sons (the Wynnes are good at sons), and his seventeen grandsons and the fourteen cousins (and their numerous male progeny), that stand between Taffy and the baronetcy, and whatever property goes with it ; so that he might be Sir Taffy, and dear Blanche Bagot (that was) might be called " my lady " ! This Shakespearean holocaust would scarcely cost me a pang !

It is a great temptation, when you have duly slain your first hero, to enrich hero number two beyond the dreams of avarice, and provide him with a title and a castle and park, as well as a handsome wife and a nice family ! But truth is inexorable—and, besides, they are just as happy as they are.

They are well off enough, anyhow, to spend a week in Paris at last, and even to stop at the Grand Hôtel, now that two of their sons are at Harrow (where their father was before them), and the third is safe at a preparatory school at Elstree, Herts.

It is their first outing since the honeymoon, and the Laird should have come with them.

But the good Laird of Cockpen (who is now a famous Royal Academician) is preparing for a honeymoon of his own. He has gone to Scotland to be married himself—to wed a fair and clever countrywoman of just a suitable age, for he has known her ever since she was a bright little lassie in short frocks, and he a promising A.R.A. (the pride of his native Dundee)—a marriage of reason, and well-seasoned affection and mutual esteem—and therefore sure to turn out a happy one, and in another fortnight or so the pair of them will very possibly be sitting to breakfast opposite each other at that very corner table in the courtyard of the Grand Hôtel, and she will laugh at everything he says—and they will live happily ever after.

So much for hero number three—D'Artagnan ? Here's to you, Sandy M'Allister, canniest, genialest and most humorous of Scots, most delicate and dainty and fanciful of British painters ? " I trink your health, mit your family's—may you lif long—and brosper ? "

¶

SO Taffy and his wife have come for their second honeymoon, their Indian-summer honeymoon, alone ; and are well content that it should be so. Two's always company for such a pair—the amusing one and the amusable !—and they are making the most of it !

They have been all over the Quartier Latin, and re-visited the well-remembered spots ; and even been allowed to enter the old studio, through the kindness of the *concierge* (who is no longer Madame Vinard). It is tenanted by two American painters, who are coldly civil on being thus disturbed in the middle of their work.

The studio is very spick and span, and most respectable. Trilby's foot, and the poem, and the sheet of plate-glass have been improved away, and a bookshelf put in their place. The new *concierge* (who has only been there a year) knows nothing of Trilby ; and of the Vinards, only that they are rich and prosperous, and live somewhere in the south of France, and that Monsieur Vinard is mayor of his commune. *Que le bon Dieu les bénisse !*

(Continued on page 152)

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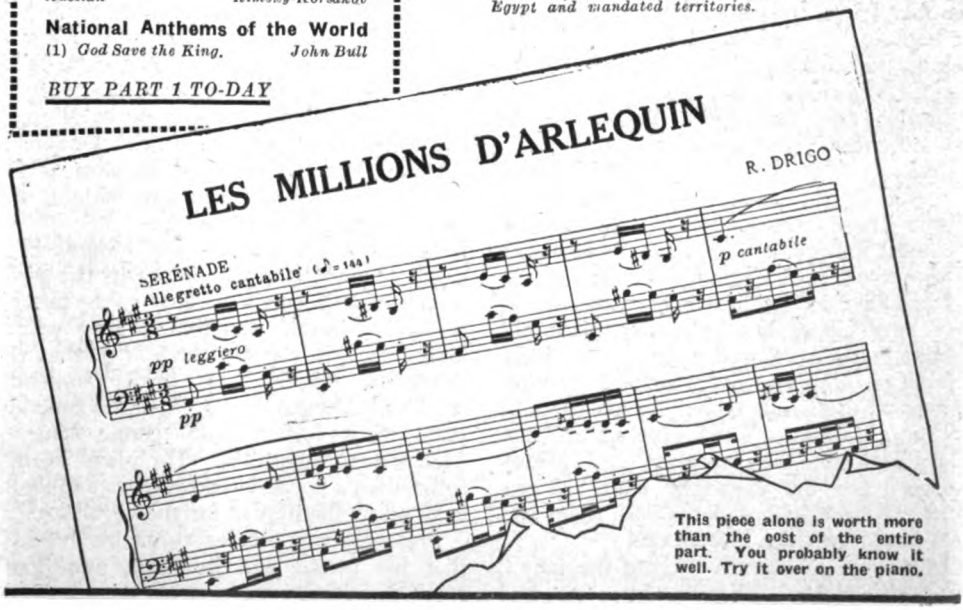


This piece alone is worth more than the cost of the entire part. You probably know it well. Try it over on the piano.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Taffy have also been driven (in an open *calèche* with two horses) through the Bois de Boulogne to St. Cloud; and to Versailles, where they lunched at the Hôtel des Réservoirs—*parlez-moi de ça!* and to St. Germain, and to Meudon (where they lunched at *la loge du garde champêtre*—a new one); they have visited the Salon, the Louvre, the porcelain manufactory at Sèvres, the Gobelins, the Hôtel Cluny, the Invalides, with Napoleon's tomb; and seen half a dozen churches, including Notre Dame and the Sainte Chapelle; and dined with the Dodors at their charming villa near Asnières, and with the Zouzous at the splendid Hôtel de la Rochemartel, and with the Duriens in the Parc Monceau (Dodor's food was best and Zouzou's worst, and at Durien's the company and talk were so good that one forgot to notice the food—and that was a pity). And the young Dodors are all right—and so are the young Duriens. As for the young Zouzous, there aren't any—and *that's* a weight off one's mind!

And they've been to the Variétés and seen Madame Chaumont, and to the Français and seen Sarah Bernhardt and Coquelin and Delaunay, and to the Opéra and heard Monsieur Lassalle.

And to-day being their last day, they are going to laze and flane about the boulevards, and buy things, and lunch anywhere, *sur le pouce*, and do the Bois once more and see *tout* Paris, and dine early at Durand's, or Bignon's (or else the Café des Ambassadeurs), and finish up the well-spent day at the "Mouches d'Espagne"—the new theatre in the Boulevard Poissonnière—to see Madame Cantharidi in "Petits Bonheurs de Contrebande," which they are told is immensely droll and quite proper—funny without being vulgar! Dodor was their informant—he had taken Madame Dodor to see it three or four times.

Madame Cantharidi, as everybody knows, is a very clever but extremely plain old woman with a cracked voice—of spotless reputation, and the irreproachable mother of a grown-up family whom she has brought up in perfection. They have never been allowed to see their mother (and grandmother) act—not even the sons. Their excellent father (who adores both them and her) has drawn the line at that!

In private life she is "quite the lady," but on the stage—well, go and see her, and you will understand how she comes to be the idol of the Parisian public. For she is the true and liberal dispenser to them of that modern *esprit gaulois* which would make the good Rabelais turn uneasily in his grave and blush there like a Benedictine Sister.

And truly she deserves the reverential love and gratitude of her *chers Parisiens!* She amused them all through the Empire; during the *année terrible* she was their only stay and comfort, and has been their chief delight ever since, and is now.

When they come back from *La Revanche*, may Madame Cantharidi be still at her post, "Les mouches d'Espagne," to welcome the returning heroes, and exult and crow with them in her funny cracked old voice; or, haply, even console them once more, as the case may be.

Mrs. Taffy is a poor French scholar. One must know French very well indeed (and many other things besides) to seize the subtle points of Madame Cantharidi's play (and by-play)!

But Madame Cantharidi has so droll a face and voice, and such very droll, odd movements, that Mrs. Taffy goes into fits of laughter as soon as the quaint little old lady comes on the stage. So heartily does she laugh that a good Parisian bourgeois turns round and remarks to his wife: "V'là une jolie p'tite Anglaise qui n'est pas bégueule, au moins! Et l' gros bœuf avec les yeux bleus en boules de loto—c'est son mari, sans doute! il n'a pas l'air trop content par exemple, celui-là!"

The fact is that the good Taffy (who knows French very well indeed) is quite scandalised, and very angry with Dodor for sending them there; and as soon as the first act is finished he means, without any fuss, to take his wife away.

As he sits patiently, too indignant to laugh at what is really funny in the piece (much of it is vulgar *without* being funny), he finds himself watching a little white-haired man in the orchestra, a fiddler, the shape of whose back seems somehow familiar, as he plays an *obbligato* accompaniment to a very broadly comic song of Madame Cantharidi's. He plays beautifully—like a master—and the loud applause is as much for him as for the vocalist.

Presently this fiddler turns his head so that his profile can be seen, and Taffy recognises him.

(*To be concluded in next month's "Argosy."*)

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